

# **INDIA WRESTS FREEDOM**





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**To**  
**MAJIBAR RAHMAN**  
**and his colleagues**  
**at the Presidency College Library**  
**(1920—1960)**



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## Preface

This is a book on the contribution made by a group of armed revolutionaries to the achievement of Indian Independence. As I had no connexion with revolutionary activity, I have often wondered whether I would be the right person to undertake such a task.

It is an act of temerity from yet another point of view. As will be evident from the title, it is a counterblast to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's justly famous book—*India Wins Freedom*, a marvel of lucidity and precision, and one of the most stimulating books I have read. A Congress President for many years and almost a permanent member of the Working Committee, Maulana Azad was also intimately connected with the discussions that revolved round the transfer of power and the creation of Pakistan. Yet although a leading actor in the drama and a man of acute intellect, he displays, at one and the same time, a penetrating insight into the intricacies of a problem with which he is directly concerned and a curiously blurred perception of the broad realities lying beyond his immediate view. He mentions Subhaschandra Bose, is taken aback by Mahatmaji's admiration for Bose's great adventure, and yet he fails to see how Mahatmaji travelled from the somewhat milk-and-water 'substance of independence' and mass civil disobedience of 1929-30, through the give-and-take of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931, the peaceable individual civil disobedience of 1933 and the individual Satyagraha of 1940, to the bellicose Quit India Resolution of August 1942. The Maulana is struck by Lord Auchinleck's 'cordial' attitude to the mutinous navymen in February 1946, but skips over the despatches in which the Commander-in-Chief in a mood of despair explained, at about the same time, how he came to be so conciliatory to the capital crime of treason in the armed forces. Equally surprising is Azad's over-simplification of Attlee's speech on 15 March 1946 in which the British Prime Minister said that the temper—Attlee used the stronger word 'temperature'—of 1946 was different from the temper of





## Foreword

In May 1931 a public reception was accorded to Rabindranath Tagore on his seventieth birthday. The festive occasion was marked by the publication of two volumes of critical appreciation of the poet's work, to which scholars from all over the world contributed. A felicitously worded address was sent by revolutionaries then being detained as state prisoners in the Buxa Camp in the foothills of the Himalayas. The poet gave a reply to this address in the form of a moving poem of which an inadequate prose translation is given below.

It may be recalled that the preceding twelve months or so were marked by vigorous revolutionary activity in Bengal and outside Bengal. In Bengal the outstanding events were the Armoury Raid at Chittagong, the attempted assassination of Police Commissioner Charles Tegart, and the assault on Writers' Buildings.

I need hardly point out that in the opening stanza of the poem there is a play on the word 'Rabi', which is the poet's name, but which in Sanskritic languages means the Sun or Sun-god.

### TO THE STATE PRISONERS IN BUXA CAMP

#### I

In the midst of darkness the hymn to the sun  
put the night to shame.

The bird was confined in the cage, but its song  
burst forth, defying the iron bars that held  
it in thrall.

From rocky crevices, the captive spurts of the  
fountain darted upwards—loud and bold.

What an ovation to the King of Light—how like the morning chants of prisoners in honour of Kings in the olden days.

## II

With its inherent strength and resilience,  
the seedling pierced the crust of the earth,  
and raising its head, offered to the sky its profound  
message and motto of freedom.

I wonder what boon the patriot-hero received at a  
fateful moment from the fiery spouse of Shiva,  
the God of Destruction, so that by means of Death  
he crected the capital city of the kingdom of Man  
the Immortal.

## III

Who are those who proclaimed to the world:  
‘We are the Sons of Immortality?’\*

Who realized that it is through self-immolation  
that the soul attains deathlessness?

Who was it that through suffering and sorrow  
wrested the celestial rapture of Shiva the Cosmic Dancer,  
and through the rhythmic movements of a  
prisoner’s chains revealed the secret of  
liberated Man?

—Rabindranath Tagore

\* In the Upanishads.

## PART ONE

# Hem Ghose and B.V.

His speech is a burning fire,  
With his lips he travaileth;  
In his heart is a blind desire,  
In his eyes a fore-knowledge of death;  
He weaves and is clothed with derision,  
Sows, and he shall not reap;  
His life is a watch or a vision  
Between a sleep and a sleep.

—Swinburne



*Pather Dabi*—Hem and Subhas

It was more than fifty years ago, late in 1929, that I was appointed a Professor (in current terminology—Assistant Professor) at Presidency College after a year and a half's stint at Hindu College, Delhi. A teenager, I think a first year student at some college, Nirad Dattagupta, who used to meet one of the friends I was staying with, pressed me hard to write an essay of criticism on Saratchandra for their journal *Benu*. As I had been for some time away at Delhi, I was not acquainted with *Benu*. If I had been, as a temporary government servant of those days I would have kept *Benu*, which was really an organ of armed revolutionaries, at more than arm's length. Nirad's plea was that Saratchandra, then at the height of his fame, was serializing his novel *Bipradas* in their paper, which was too poor to pay him anything, and so in lieu of monetary consideration, they wanted to express their gratitude in the shape of a critical exegesis. Why they selected me, a student and teacher of English, for writing on Saratchandra is more than I can say. But I yielded to Nirad's importunities and before long an essay of mine—'An introduction to Saratchandra'—appeared in *Benu*.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the essay I wrote, it seems to have impressed two men—Subhaschandra Bose, then pining in prison, who, these people told me, wanted to meet the writer after his release, and Saratchandra, who, too, said that he would be glad to cultivate my acquaintance. Subhaschandra Bose I never saw except from a distance, but one day Bhupendrakishore Rakshitroy, the editor of *Benu*, and Nikunjalal Sen, an associate of the editor and a relation of mine, took me to Saratchandra's village home at Samtaber, Panitras. We made the journey partly by train and partly on foot and spent several hours with the novelist, who was kind enough to accompany us

half the way to Deulti station from where we took our train back to Howrah.

Inside the house, Saratchandra and I sat on two chairs face to face and discussed a variety of topics. The first thing that struck me was that Saratchandra, whom in my early student days, during the Non-cooperation movement, I knew as a follower of Gandhi, had become an ardent exponent of armed revolution and an admirer of Subhaschandra Bose. Indeed, he put it to me: 'Do you think a young revolutionary who goes to kill a white man, a limb of imperialism, with a revolver in one pocket and a packet of potassium cyanide powder in another, loves the motherland less fervently than *your* Mahatma?' He was very soon to write in *Benu* an article under the caption 'A New Programme', in which he severely castigated *charkha* and *khadi*. Although politics cropped up now and then, our main topics of discussion were literature and, more particularly, Saratchandra's own works. At that time he was nursing a grievance against Rabindranath, who, he said, had refused to raise his voice against the banning of *Pather Dabi*.<sup>2</sup> I looked at the book as a piece of literature and asked him about the materials that formed the basis of his revolutionary novel. Was the first scene taken from Dhangopal Mukherji's 'My Brother's Face', describing how his elder brother Jadugopal, the revolutionary leader, hoodwinked Intelligence detectives and railwaymen at Howrah Station, or from some account of Rashbihari Bose's escape to Japan? Saratchandra answered in the negative, saying that he had made it out of what Hem had told him. I rallied him on the credibility of the plot, the relevancy of the secret societies founded by the hero Sabyasachi in far-away Burma, China, Japan and islands in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific. The artist, whose imagination works in a mysterious way, cannot always clearly define the stages of the creative process, or it may be that in such a sensitive matter Saratchandra did not want to take me into confidence. But he repeated more than once that the materials and inspiration for the novel were supplied by Hem, the rest was his own fancy, and the work its own apology. Incidentally, he often referred to Subhaschandra—his patriotism, his capacity for suffering, his large vision which belonged only to the great revolutionary who is also a creator.

I could not quite follow the relevance of the frequent references to Subhaschandra and was puzzled by his reticence on the theme, though he was otherwise very communicative. Who I wondered was this Hem who was at the root of one of the most moving novels in the Bengali language? My two companions—the editor of *Benu* and my nephew Nikunja—who were squatting on the floor a few cubits away from us, were tight-lipped and did not say anything on the subject even after we had parted from Saratchandra. The question haunted my mind for some days and then I forgot it. Armed revolution was soon afoot again, there was the Armoury Raid at Chittagong, the attempt on Tegart who escaped narrowly and had to be bundled out of India, and there were so many other incidents. Not long after, I found that Nikunja was connected with some secret society and so was Binoybhusan Sengupta, with whom I had been, in other ways, in very close contact. We were both students of the same school, Binoy four years my junior, and there my father was the Headmaster, and his father, an assistant teacher, was my private tutor in mathematics. Both Nikunja, who was in Dacca Collegiate School, and Binoy were very promising students, but being absorbed in some mission that had nothing to do with their home or their school, had passed out only as ordinary graduates. Although we met very often when they were not in detention—in fact, Binoy and I had grown up together—I had only a dim notion of their mission and none about their activities. Soon after, in 1930, I was startled to hear that Badal (Sudhir) Gupta, who along with two companions—Binoy Bose and Dinesh Gupta—had stormed into Writers’ Buildings and met a martyr’s death by committing suicide, was a co-villager of mine. At that time he was living very close to my own home in village Banari on the bank of the Padma, and Nikunja was a teacher in this school in which I had my first lessons. This gave me what might be called some inkling of Nikunja’s activities at Banari School. A few months earlier, Binoy Bose, Badal’s companion in the assault on Writers’ Buildings, had fatally shot at Dacca Mr Lowman, I.G. of Police. In 1931 Sasanka Dasgupta, another nephew of mine, and Manoranjan Sengupta, a cousin, had absconded from the latter’s house. What surprised me most was that a visitor had seen them at night, and within a few minutes of their escape, the house

was surrounded by the police. To this day I do not know who this visitor was.

A revealing epilogue to this drama was the search that was carried out by the police party next morning. Manoranjan's father was closely questioned about the guests that occasionally visited their house, for Intelligence agencies had suggested that one of the murderers of Mr Peddie, Collector of Midnapore, had fled to Calcutta and was first accommodated there. I remembered that some time earlier Sasanka had gone to join Midnapore College on the ostensible ground that there were facilities for the study of science there. This is not the end of the story. Peddie's successor Douglas was murdered too, I think at a meeting of the District Board, and a letter of his published after his death showed how he had been passing his days in a nightmare of terror in the district of which he was the all-powerful boss! Burge, who succeeded Douglas, was shot dead on the football ground, and one of the alleged participants in the action, Santigopal Sen, who got a life sentence, was yet another relation of mine. I remember having seen Santi as a small boy at Palang (Faridpore) where my father was the Headmaster of the school and Santi's grandfather the secretary. How Santi developed into a desperate revolutionary and how from Maldah in North Bengal, where his family was settled, he managed to establish himself at Midnapore in the south struck me as amazing.

A most innocent act of mine almost brought me, too, within this network, and possibly I escaped harassment because at the critical moment in 1934 I was away at Chittagong where I had been transferred a short while ago. In 1931 I was living with only one other inmate in my house, a nephew, who was as ignorant of the activities of this group as I, when a boy of our village arrived in Calcutta; he seemed to have had no one to support him. At that time our village was being washed away by the erosion of the Padma, and people were emigrating this way and that. My nephew was approached by this boy who said that he had found a place to lodge in but lacked the means to maintain himself. So for a few days, until he could make other arrangements, he wanted to take his meals at my house. I did not know the boy, neither do I remember his face; and it was long after that I heard that his name was Manoranjan. Soon



after this minor episode, my wife and other members of my family came to join me, we moved to a larger house, and a year after I was transferred to Chittagong. It was there that I read in the newspaper that at Darjeeling two or three young assailants had tried to shoot down Sir John Anderson, Governor of Bengal, who escaped by an accident. One of those in charge of the operation was this Manoranjan who had taken his meals at my house some time earlier.

Certain aspects of this incident struck me, and one of them, I heard, struck Sir John Anderson also. How could this boy who had only two and a half years ago trekked his way from a ruined hamlet acquire the cast iron mould of a front-line revolutionary, how could he elude the elaborate arrangements made by the Intelligence Branch of Bengal Police to launch the audacious attack on the mighty Governor of the Province, who would one day be in the running for the Prime Ministership of England? I heard later on that the names of the two assailants and Manoranjan were not found in police records anywhere and not one of them had been shadowed by a spy. Sir John Anderson is reported to have blamed it on the ineptitude of the police administration and taken his top officials to task. That was a proconsul's way of looking at the work of his immediate subordinates. But the native police officials who did the actual work seemed to know better. The successive attempts on Britishers, officials and influential non-officials, had scared the bureaucracy, and security arrangements were so strict that the white men—official or non-official—were cut off from the people they were supposed to govern. I remember that once during this period I was travelling with a high police official who told me casually, 'What has the administration come to? At present the District Magistrate is the most important prisoner in his district. His bungalow has a tighter ring of guards than the condemned prisoner in his cell!' That is the bane of imperialism; the governors are totally cut off from the people they govern. I saw that the Commissioner and the District Magistrate at Chittagong used to have their offices in their residences on hill tops, and the European District Judge also put forward the plea that he should not go to court but restrict his duties to hearing appeals in his residence!

'Operation Anderson' was not without its semi-comical side

too. Prodded by the Governor, the police ferreted out the number of the house occupied by me before my transfer. Possibly it was a half-truth given out by Manoranjan himself to throw the police off the scent, for he must have wanted to shield the people with whom he actually lived prior to his departure. Calcutta Police raided the house now occupied by new tenants who knew neither me nor Manoranjan, rummaged their belongings, ripped their bedding and mattresses—all in search of hidden arms. The Bengal Police also went to our abandoned village home, half-swallowed by the Padma, dug the earth, once again for hidden arms, but came back disappointed. All this I heard after I was re-transferred to Calcutta in 1935, but not from any one of the revolutionaries mentioned above, most of whom were in jail or in detention camps.

A Deputy Superintendent of Police saw me and put me a few questions, and he left me alone when he was satisfied that I could be of no help to them. A total outsider, I felt that the atmosphere was becoming relaxed, as many of those known to me were gradually released and some of them seemed to settle down in happy domesticity. It was in this situation that the Second World War started in 1939, but during the first two years we did not feel the impact of the convulsion. One afternoon in 1941, I had gone to my father-in-law's house in Bowbazar where I met Binoybhushan Sengupta, who lived not far off and was visiting that house to meet an aunt. My visit, which had coincided with his, was equally casual. We came out together, obviously to return to our respective residences. It was all very leisurely, very informal. Suddenly when we were at the main gate, Binoy stopped short and said, 'No, I do not want to be seen with you on the main road today. Go ahead. I shall move out some time after.' I took it all very lightly and returned home. The next day I read in the newspaper that Subhaschandra Bose, who had been living in seclusion for some time, had fled the country. Now I realized that Binoy was in the know of things, including the timing of the announcement, for by then Subhaschandra was out of reach, and he knew, too, that he would himself be arrested soon, and to save me from harassment, he did not want me to be seen in his company in the streets of Calcutta. Before long Binoy was, indeed, in police custody, Subhaschandra began broadcasting from Germany,

and after three years Netaji was on the north-eastern frontier of India at the head of the Indian National Army! One can easily count the days from Netaji's advance and retreat to the withdrawal of the British, lock, stock and barrel, from India. In between came the splendid spectacle of the trial of three I.N.A. officers at the bar of a Government that was on its last legs—what a contrast to the tense, thrilling days of the Alipore Conspiracy case of less than four decades ago!

The desultory account given above of the days from my advent as a literary critic in *Benu* to my co-villager Manoranjan hitting the headlines as one of the accused sentenced to death in the Anderson shooting case, might look like a jigsaw puzzle, but when, later on, I learnt that there was one man—Hemchandra Ghose—who had masterminded the entire movement, the picture became clear, the drama acquired coherence and all the actors could be fitted into their roles. This Hemchandra Ghose, known as ‘Barda’ (the eldest brother) among his followers, many of whom had not even seen his face, is the same man whom Saratchandra Chatterji had presented to me as the fountainhead of *Pather Dabi*. He had built up his organization carefully, inch by inch, undaunted by difficulties and frustrations, and then in 1930 Binoy Bose opened its deadly innings by killing Lowman, the Inspector-General of Police, and after this, step by step, through success and failure, it contributed its share to the achievement of freedom.

What is this party of which the leader was Hemchandra Ghose, who in course of time became the right-hand man of Subhaschandra Bose? It used to be called B.V., or Bengal Volunteers, because it supplied the flower of the volunteer force organized during the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1928, under Subhaschandra himself as G.O.C. (General Officer Commanding). B.V. was only a convenient label adopted at a late stage to confuse outsiders; it was looked upon by the police as an associate of Jugantar Party, and I have been told that in Government records Hemchandra Ghose's followers were named ‘Jugantar Friends’. Originally it was called Mukti Sangha but this name was seldom used. An associate of ‘Anushilan’ and an ally of ‘Jugantar’, it had links with both but was not to be identified with either. Its leadership, its organization and more especially its programmes were all its

own. It had a single leader Hemchandra Ghose whose word was law, very much like Sabyasachi's in *Pather Dabi*.

The organization was not a big, sprawling thing but a well-knit band which had little fear of defection and treachery. One of the leaders proudly claimed to me that their group had never nursed an 'approver' and had only one 'lost soul' by which epithet he meant that this chum of theirs had been converted to communism which, for these fervid nationalists, was only bluff and bluster.

Anticipating the story to be unfolded in the following pages, one may say that the B.V. aimed at two things with unswerving constancy. First of all, it wanted to strike terror in the minds of Englishmen who jauntily carried on what they called the white man's burden but really ruled by terrorizing the country with the help of force. The word 'terrorism' has acquired a bad odour because of its use by the British officials in India to describe the revolutionaries who wanted to subvert a government supposed to have been 'established by law'. But this notion of 'a government established by law' is a fiction and a fraud, as is shown by the reaction of the *Times* to the very moderate reformist deliberations of the first Indian National Congress of 1885. 'India was won by force,' said the *Times*, with its unquestioned authority, 'and must be governed by force, and if the British were to withdraw, it would be in favour not of the most fluent tongue or of the most ready pen but the strongest arm and the sharpest sword!'<sup>3</sup> This is unabashed terrorism, and it deserved to be met by terrorism equally unabashed.

It seems that when Subhaschandra Bose looked for his own band of armed followers, he selected Hem Ghose's group for its compactness, solidarity, and secretiveness. So far as I know, no record has been kept of how the two leaders were drawn to each other and what is the contribution of either to the joint struggle for freedom. It may be that it was Subhaschandra Bose who conceived the plan of winning over the Indian Army to their side, for then it would be easy to subvert by force the Government established by force. The idea was not altogether new. It is generally thought that Lala Lajpat Rai was deported out of India on the ground that he was tampering with the loyalty of the Sepoys. The charge might have been just trumped up to serve as an excuse for incarcerating a political firebrand or there

might be some truth behind it also. Lalaji won a libel suit against a newspaper that published the allegation. But that proves nothing. What Subhaschandra did in the Second World War was not merely to tamper and tinker; he converted almost an entire army to fight against its former rulers. After this large-scale defection it could be no longer possible for the British Raj, in spite of the defeat of both Germany and Japan, to rely on the loyalty of the Indian Army, and so with the Magistrate a virtual prisoner in his district, the senior officials working behind iron palings in the 'protected zone' of the Secretariat and soldiers joining en masse the I.N.A. formed by Netaji Subhaschandra Bose, the British Empire in India was doomed.

I may now revert to the conversation I had with Saratchandra Chatterji in the presence of Bhupen Rakshitroy and Nikunja Sen, two close disciples of Hem Ghose. C. F. Andrews said that Rabindranath Tagore had almost a premonition of the First World War; 'his highly sensitive nature had made him feel dimly beforehand the tragedy which was about to happen.'<sup>4</sup> It might similarly be said that Saratchandra's imagination, working on the materials supplied by Hemchandra Ghose, had prescience of the Second World War and the part to be played by Subhaschandra Bose, who, on data given by Hem, seemed to have been cast in the role of Sabyasachi. As we read the novel, drug-addict Girish Mahapatra of the novel reminds us of the bearded, deaf and dumb Pathan who slipped out of Calcutta and reached Afghanistan, and Netaji's later Odyssey, if more circuitous, was not less hazardous than Sabyasachi's; and although Saratchandra's hero does not give details of his activities, it is clear that an important part of it is an attempt to win over the Indian members of the Army, and it was in course of this work that Nilkanta Joshi was arrested and hanged, and later on news comes that Mahatap and Surya Singh were caught sowing sedition in the regiments to which they belonged. Sabyasachi, who, like all great revolutionaries, is a robust optimist, says, referring to Indian Army men and the Police Force, that those who are foes today might be friends tomorrow. Was not this optimism fulfilled in Netaji's latest exploit in Japan, Burma and Kohima?

As I gather together these tit-bits lying here and there in my tattered memory, my mind goes back to the Congress session of

1928, when I had come to Calcutta during Christmas from Delhi. I visited neither the Congress session nor the Congress Exhibition but heard and read of the tussle between the Moderates who did not pitch their demands higher than Dominion Status and the Extremists who would be satisfied with nothing less than independence. The two most spectacular things were the procession in which the President-elect Pandit Motilal Nehru came from Howrah Station to the city and the demonstrations in military style held by 'Bengal Volunteers' (B.V.) who had army ranks—Lieutenant, Captain, Major, etc. with Subhaschandra as the General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.). The military pageantry seemed at that time to be somewhat irrelevant in the prevailing atmosphere of non-violence in Gandhiji's Congress, and the grandiose display was not without a touch of comicality because the military 'officers' were inhabitants of a colony where the use of firearms was banned, and many newspapers splashed cartoons of Subhaschandra as 'gawk' (Goc). But they did not know what was in the womb of time and had no idea that the joke would recoil upon them, for in less than two years Inspector-General Lowman was laid low by a bullet fired by one of these B.V.'s, and in less than two decades India, although still a colony, saw the rise of the Indian National Army which owed no allegiance except to Netaji and his government, and soon after, thanks largely to the impact of this novel experiment, India herself would be free!

## The Beginnings: 'Mukti Sangha'

It has been said in the opening chapter that the B.V. had its links with the Indian National Army, which, under the command of Netaji, marched into India via Japan, Singapore and Burma. It was the B.V. which, under the overall supervision of Satyaranjan Bakshi and with the collaboration of Kirti (Kisan) Party of Punjab, managed to smuggle Subhaschandra out of India. A young man—I think he was in his teens then—Santi alias Chanchal Ganguly was selected to follow Subhaschandra up to Kabul, along the same forbidden route, to act as the link man there, and to maintain a regular line of communication with Subhas in Berlin. He, too, was a B.V. boy, who was chosen for this task, apparently safe but potentially dangerous, because Satyaranjan Bakshi knew that he was not a police suspect. When Netaji was advancing towards India at the head of the I.N.A., many of the B.V. men were detenus at the Buxa Camp on the Bhutan frontier, and these people, with the firebrand 'Major' Satya Gupta in the van, were getting ready to break prison walls and march on to join when the zero hour arrived. That is all the B.V. did on the international front. Except for this, Hem Ghose's volunteers were an all-Bengal group, the more effective on account of its limited field of activities.

Hemchandra Ghose, born on 24 October 1884, was the youngest son of Mathuranath Ghose, a leading lawyer of Dacca of those days. This was two years after the publication of Bankimchandra's *Anandamath*, and it was about this time that the 'Anushilan' essays, expounding Bankimchandra's views on religion, began to be serialized in Akshaychandra Sarkar's *Navajivan*. These essays were published in book form in 1888. Five years after, in 1893, when Hemchandra was nine years old, Swami Vivekananda delivered his epoch-making address

at the Chicago Congress, where he held aloft the banner of Indian philosophy and culture and expounded his views on religion as service to mankind.

A boy of robust health, Hemchandra was even as a school student attracted to physical culture and very soon gave evidence of his proficiency in gymnastics. At Dacca, in those days, there was scope for physical culture, particularly on account of the presence and influence of two well-known figures, Pareshnath Ghose (1856-1923) and Shyamakanta Banerji (1858-1918), both of them men of prodigious strength and renowned wrestlers. Young Hemchandra regularly attended Pareshnath's gymnasium and became a skilled gymnast. He excelled in wrestling and *lathi*-play, the nearest equivalent of military exercise. He was also called upon to employ his physical strength in quelling minor disturbances, particularly in subduing local ruffians. Although he did not receive much formal schooling, he was a voracious reader of books; and because he delighted and excelled in physical exercise, he was naturally drawn to stories of heroism, of the sustained struggles of the Rajputs, the 1857 revolt, the skirmishes against Indigo planters and, more particularly, the revolt of the Boers against the British. He was also deeply stirred by the recent exploits of Tikendrajit in Manipur, his resistance to the British and his martyrdom in 1891. Young Hemchandra was inspired with the ambition of fighting heroically for some great cause, particularly the cause of freeing his country from foreign domination. His thoughts would have taken some time to crystallize, but for various reasons the atmosphere was then surcharged with ideas and dreams of resurgence, and quite early in life Hemchandra was drawn to a life of dedicated service.

Although secret patriotic societies are said to have existed in Bengal in the seventies of the nineteenth century, they were somewhat amateurish, and the credit for founding the first revolutionary society for driving out the British goes to Wasudeo Balwant Phadke (1845-82) of Maharastra, who worked almost single-handed, and died without making any impact and leaving no disciple to take up his legacy. After this there were sporadic efforts, notably by Thakur Saheb who initiated Aurobindo, then at Baroda, into the cult of revolution. But these activities tapered off, and not much was done until Balganga-



dhar Tilak arrived on the scene and made an abiding impression not only on Maharashtra but also on all-India politics.

It has seemed to me that creative action, like creative writing, should have a background of what Arnold called critical ideas. Here Bengal was fortunate in possessing two great thinkers—Bankimchandra and Vivekananda. Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* not only contains the song 'Bande Mataram', which soon became our national anthem, but also gives an outline of how revolutionary societies should be organized. *Dharmatattwa* or *Anushilan*, as the sub-title implies, elaborates his religion of culture, by which the author means the all-round development of our faculties—physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. Of such culture Bhabani Pathak in *Debi Chaudhurani* is an exponent and Praphulla a complete embodiment, although in the chronicles they are both ordinary dacoits who, taking advantage of the anarchy prevailing in the early days of British rule, ravaged the countryside like any other gang of freebooters. Vivekananda was a monk who preached the religion of service to mankind and held aloft the banner of Indian philosophy and religion. But by the end of the nineteenth century, when he established the Ramakrishna Mission, the full picture of British exploitation was manifest in all its luridness; and one of his closest disciples, Sister Nivedita, was an Irish woman with Sinn Fein connexions. Vivekananda must have realized that serving a harried, exploited, starving people is necessary and may also be heroic, but it is like ploughing the sands. So when with ringing voice he said to his countrymen 'Arise, Awake', the listeners could not miss the deeper meaning that they could not rise without dislodging the usurper. An ascetic and a Vedantist, he did not lay down any recipe for political revolution, but he is reported to have said to another leading disciple of Ramakrishna, Swami Saradananda: 'Even a cow tied to a rope makes all kinds of efforts to get free.' In her presidential address at the Indian National Congress in 1917, Annie Besant, another Irish woman and more widely known than Sister Nivedita, listed Vivekananda's influence as one of the leading causes of the emergence of Indian nationalism. Vivekananda died on 4 July 1902 at the early age of thirty-nine, but before that he had inspired his countrymen throughout India with his message of dedicated service, not excepting the young ~~man~~ at Dacca who,

not satisfied with physical exercises at Pareshnath Ghose's gymnasium, was thirsting to devote his life to the service of his countrymen. In April 1901, when Vivekananda was at Dacca, Hemchandra saw him twice—on 13 and 14 April and felt the magnetic influence of the great Swamiji, who told Hemchandra and his friends, 'A subject nation has no religion. Try to acquire power and strength to free the country from its exploiters.' Among the friends was a young man who will figure again in the present narrative; his name was Srishchandra Pal.

When Hemchandra Ghose was coming under Vivekananda's influence, thoughts of political revolution were brewing in a wider field. Although Britishers did not like the Indian National Congress for its criticism of the Government now posing as one 'established by law', fervent patriots felt that the attitude of the Congress was one of mendicancy. Reference has already been made to the sporadic activities of men like Phadke, which could easily be put down. Aurobindo Ghose, a born poet and a born revolutionary, was educated at Cambridge where he got a First in the Classics, but he was also a member of a society called 'The Lotus and the Sword', a name suggestive of his twofold ambition. He passed into the I.C.S. but allowed himself to be disqualified by not attending the riding test. Coming out to India in 1893 as Professor of Baroda College, where he became Principal later on, he seems to have approached political revolution first through an exegesis of literature. Bankimchandra was then the greatest figure in Bengali as well as in Indian fiction, but Aurobindo tried to interpret Bankimchandra not as an artist but as a thinker, laying emphasis on Bankim's later novels, *Anandamath* ('The Abbey of Bliss') where he draws a glowing picture of political revolution, and *Debi Chaudhurani* where, through a narrative partly political and partly domestic, he enunciates a new religion of *anushilan* or all-round culture. Aurobindo's innate revolutionary ardour was now deepened by his contact with Thakur Saheb, a Maratha nobleman who was also an exponent of armed rebellion. In 1902 Aurobindo sent a disciple named Jatindranath Banerji and also his own brother Barindrakumar Ghose to establish revolutionary societies in Bengal.

In Bengal the soil had already been made ready by several

workers, notably by two friends, both of them England-returned—Surendranath Banerjea and Pramathanath Mitra, more usually known as P. Mitra. Surendranath Banerjea, whom Europeans in India used to call 'Surrender-not', was an unrivalled orator who preached the message of patriotism from one public platform to another. If not as great as Surendranath, P. Mitra also was a good speaker and a competent writer, but adapting the blatant warning of the *Times* quoted in the previous chapter, we may say that he seemed to have less faith in the polished tongue and the ready pen than in the strong arm and the sharp sword. So he set his mind on establishing a secret society for the training of young men who would be true servants of the country. There were some attempts towards the end of the nineteenth century at founding secret revolutionary societies in Bengal and P. Mitra might have been involved in these amateurish adventures. It was, however, in 1902 that a secret society named Anushilan Samiti, which owed its name to Bankimchandra's book *Anushilan* (or *Dharmatattwa*), was formally established with P. Mitra as President, Chittaranjan Das and Aurobindo Ghose as Vice-Presidents and Surendranath Tagore as Secretary. It grew out of a gymnastic club in Madan Mitra Lane where it was located, and the new name, it was said, was suggested by Naren Bhattacharya, later on famous as Manabendranath Roy. This, however, seems to be somewhat doubtful, because Naren Bhattacharya was only fifteen years old in 1902, and his contact with secret revolutionary movement does not seem to have begun before 1905. What is more certain is the connexion of this society with the group that had come from Baroda, led by Jatindranath Banerji and Barin Ghose, because otherwise Aurobindo would not have been made a Vice-President. Of the organized secret societies in modern Bengal, Anushilan Samiti is the oldest and one of the largest.

P. Mitra, whose life's ambition was fulfilled with the formation of the Anushilan Samiti (Society), was eager to establish branches throughout the country, and in quest of that mission he came to Dacca in 1905 where he met Pulinbihari Das, who, taking his cue from Rabindranath Tagore's niece Sarala Devi, had already started a gymnasium for physical training. As Pulin Das, too, had patriotic ideas, P. Mitra had little difficulty in initiating him into the revolutionary creed, and under this

young man's leadership the Anushilan Samiti not only flourished but proliferated, and what had been *lathi*-play now became a preparatory training for military combat. Hemchandra Ghose, who shunned publicity, had not been sitting idle either. After meeting Vivekananda in 1901, he returned to his gymnasium, but it now became a recruiting ground for patriotic volunteers dedicated to the cause of freedom. In 1905 he had organized a hard core of devotees who banded themselves into a society called the Mukti Sangha (Liberation League). Amongst those who took the oath along with the leader were Srish Pal, who had accompanied him in his interviews with Swami Vivekananda, Haridas Datta, Khagen Das, Dr Surendra Bardhan, Bibhuti Basu, Nikunja Sen (Senior), Krishnakanta Adhikari, Munshi Alimuddin (Master Saheb) and Haridas Roy. Hemchandra Ghose met P. Mitra at Dacca and discussed organizational matters with him, but although he agreed to work in collaboration with the Anushilan Samiti, Hemchandra thought that it would be best for his Mukti Sangha to maintain its separate identity. Swami Vivekananda was a patriot of patriots, but he was also a monk wedded to spiritual exercise. It would be idle to speculate what his views would have been about these developments. Possibly he would not have allowed the sanctuary of a monastery to be used as an arsenal for anarchists. But it is significant that in 1903, a year after his death, his Irish disciple Sister Nivedita severed her connexion with the Ramakrishna Mission, and some people think that she took this step in order to come closer to nationalist politics.

Even in its earliest days, the revolutionary movement was faced with a contradiction, which, however, it soon got over. If a secret society was to wage war against a power armed to the teeth, it would require lethal weapons, and *lathis*, even swords, must be replaced by bombs, revolvers, guns and all other implements of modern warfare. These must be stolen or smuggled, in a word, obtained by questionable methods. If arms were thus to be acquired, large sums of money would be required, and organizational work, particularly when such work was secret and hazardous, would also be expensive. How must the 'sinews of war' be found? Subscriptions coming in dribblets would amount to little and donors in such risky ventures would be

difficult to find. The only alternative that remained was robbery, which would be not only unlawful but immoral. Bankim's creative imagination saw this contradiction clearly, and he applies double standards in his two novels—*Anandamath* and *Debi Chaudhurani*—which are generally classed together. Whatever Bhabani Pathak and Debi Chaudhurani, both of them historical figures, might have been in real life, in Bankimchandra's novel neither of them is a robber, although Bhabani Pathak acquired wealth by robbing dishonest people before meeting Praphulla (Debi Chaudhurani) with her accidental inheritance of enormous wealth. In the novel Bhabani Pathak just fills the vacuum between the end of Muslim domination and the establishment of firm administration by the British. At the end of the story, he surrenders like a law-abiding citizen and undergoes transportation. Debi Chaudhurani's 'queenship' was only fair and generous distribution of the wealth she had stumbled upon in a dilapidated building. Such things happen only in fairy tales, and this is what many of our pioneers in revolution failed to notice.

Members of the Anushilan Samiti, when faced with the problem of securing arms and money, found themselves divided into two groups. P. Mitra, it is said, recoiled from the idea of acquiring the sinews of war by plunder and retired from the struggle, leaving the leadership to less finicky people like Pulin Das and his associates. In spite of her Sinn Fein antecedents, Sister Nivedita angrily sent away a member who wanted a revolver for use in a proposed robbery, but in doing so she only banished herself from the movement. Soon sharp differences arose also between the two leaders sent by Aurobindo from Baroda—Jatindranath Banerji and Barindrakumar Ghose. There might be personal incompatibility, but from the records that have come down to us, it seems that the differences were also ideological. Barin was a firebrand who stood for violent action whereas Jatindranath advocated propaganda and publicity through lectures and writings. It was the group led by Barindra that prevailed, and Jatindranath, who pursued his own way, trekking through various parts of the land and making contacts with like-minded people, ultimately retired from political life and settled down as a monk, naming himself appropriately Swami Niralamba (the 'Propless').

The philosophy of violence is cogently argued and very vividly portrayed by Bankimchandra in *Anandamath*, where the soldiers of freedom live in a monastery and call themselves Santans or sons of the Mother who was their only deity. So whatever is demanded for her liberation—arson, robbery, assassination or pitched battle—is virtue or religion, and significantly the leader of the band calls himself Satyananda because he is in pursuit of what he and his disciples look upon as the only Truth. No wonder *Anandamath* became the Bible of the revolutionaries of Bengal and 'Bande Mataram' their sacred hymn. When Sabyasachi in Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi* elucidates the cult of violence, saying that truth is not a dead fossil but a living entity and that he creates truth as he marches on towards his goal, he carries forward Satyananda's message and echoes the sentiments of Barindrakumar Ghose, Pulin Das, Rashbihari Bose, Jatindranath Mukherji and Hemchandra Ghose.

## II

The freedom movement, if we review its progress from the birth of the Anushilan Samiti, received in its early days a propelling impetus from an unexpected quarter—the Government which it wanted to destroy. Lord Curzon, who was Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905, was one of the most distinguished Englishmen of his time and possibly the ablest administrator sent to India as the representative of His Majesty's Government. However, he had a career punctuated with irony and contradiction. One of his ambitions in life was to become Viceroy of India, which he had visited twice before assuming this high office, but as he also wanted to resume his political life in England, he chose an Irish Peerage in order to be able to return to the House of Commons. In India he ruled like one of the great Moghuls and got a second term in 1904, but he had to quit in dudgeon, because accustomed to wield supreme power, he found a Roland for an Oliver in the Commander-in-chief—Lord Kitchener—who claimed autonomy in military matters. Any discussion about this dissension, which involved a matter of principle about the relationship between civil and military authorities, would be a needless digression. But it seems to be an irony of fate that this overbearing satrap had to leave his

Viceroyalty on account of disagreement with his own subordinate. Back to London and Westminster, he again made his way up, and then with the House of Commons getting more and more rowdy and the leading peers Lord Lansdowne and Lord Crewe due for retirement, he thought that the House of Lords would be a more convenient place for the fulfilment of his ambition which was now fixed on the Prime Ministership of Great Britain. So after executing some minor formality and accepting a 'representative Irish Peerage', he took his seat in the Lords and rose to be the second man in Bonar Law's Government, presiding at Cabinet meetings during the Premier's illness, but when Bonar Law resigned and the fruit was within his grasp, King George V called for Stanley Baldwin on the ground that in these days the Prime Minister should be a House of Commons man!

In India his most momentous act was the Partition of Bengal, which he must have intended as a death-blow to the revolutionary movement but which really invigorated it beyond the wildest dreams of the revolutionaries themselves. Possessing an agile intelligence and capable of enormous industry, Curzon had command of the minute details of administration, but like all imperialists, he was short-sighted and incapable of sympathetic understanding. From the Viceregal lodge in Calcutta, he saw how a Bengali named Surendranath Banerjea had begun to dominate the Indian National Congress; he also felt the pulse of discontent amongst the Bengali intelligentsia, and from his network of espionage, he must have gathered how another Bengali named Aurobindo Ghose had begun sowing the seeds of sedition in Bengal and outside Bengal. That this is not mere speculation is shown by the hasty, clandestine way in which Curzon and his confidants at home proceeded to the work of truncating Bengal in order to weaken it politically. As far back as 1868 Sir Stafford Northcote had complained of the Bengal Presidency as too unwieldy for administrative convenience but not much attention was paid to his complaint. About three decades later, in 1896, Sir Charles Elliot, who first set foot on the soil of Bengal as its Lt-Governor, made the same complaint and suggested that some parts of East Bengal be united with Assam. For fear of arousing public discontent and on account of the opposition of the judiciary, the proposal was dropped.

It was now Lord Curzon's turn to take up the matter and see it through. There seems to be a parallelism between General Gordon's adventure in the Sudan and Curzon's Partition of Bengal. The imperialist section of Gladstone's Cabinet had sent Gordon ostensibly to make a report, and he occupied the entire Sudan! Here too, presumably in league with the imperialist-minded Conservative Cabinet (1902-1905), Lord Curzon, on the plea of administrative convenience, made a most unethical partition of Bengal, knowing full well that it would hurt the sentiments of the Bengalis as a race, but an imperialist feels confident that a subject nation which should have no nationalism might be easily whipped into submission. The way Curzon proceeded to make this administrative reform carries its own commentary. The Viceroy sent his proposal to the British Government in February 1905 and it was sanctioned in June of the same year. The Parliament was informed only in August, and when an M.P., himself a former Secretary of State, raised an objection on the ground that the full facts had not been presented, he was assured that all papers would be laid before the House—a pledge that was not honoured or intended to be honoured, for within two months the necessary legislation was rushed through at a session of the Imperial Legislative Council in Simla without any Indian member of the august body knowing anything about it.

This was the spark that set Bengal ablaze, and at the Congress session held at Benares that year Sarala Devi and her band sang in chorus Bankimchandra's 'Bande Mataram', and the President Gopalkrishna Gokhale, who was not a radical, pithily remarked: 'What Bengal thinks today, the rest of India thinks tomorrow.' At Baroda, Aurobindo felt that the right moment had come for him to lead the revolutionary movement, and he hastened to Calcutta where he soon became editor of the newly started English journal *Bande Mataram* and also Principal of the National College, which was equally new. Barindrakumar took charge of the Bengali *Jugantar*, which, too, appeared at about the same time, soon to be reinforced by *Sandhya*, of which Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya became the editor. All these journals began actively inspiring and supporting revolution. It was not merely a paper warfare, for the band of patriots who had gathered together in Calcutta under the leadership of



Aurobindo toured different places, forming revolutionary societies and preparing the nation for confrontation with the tyranny which had been established by force and which by force alone could be dislodged. Barin Ghose, who had organizational abilities of a high order, not only helped in spreading branches in different parts of Bengal but also set up something like a factory for the manufacture of bombs in a garden-house in Muraripukur Road in Calcutta. There were some attempts at killing unpopular officials, such as Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the oppressive Lt-Governor of Eastern Bengal or Mr Kingsford, a notorious Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, who had been transferred to Muzaffarpore. But before the movement had made any noticeable progress beyond creating enthusiasm amongst the educated classes and recruiting some dedicated young men, the police got scent of the underground activities of the revolutionaries. The Muraripukur house and other hide-outs of the revolutionaries were raided in May 1908, and more than forty persons were rounded up. The Government now seemed to be on top.

It would be both unnecessary and irrelevant to recount the entire story of the sensational Alipore Conspiracy case which ended in February 1910. Most of the revolutionaries were given various terms of imprisonment with the sentence of transportation for life for two leading figures, one of them Barindrakumar Ghose. At this distance of time what surprises the student of history is not the sentence that was passed on Barin Ghose but his attitude to the movement he had helped to initiate. The revolution had just begun, but he not only made a confessional statement but could persuade all his comrades (with one exception) to do the same. He even said that his mission was over! Aurobindo, who had been described by his counsel Chittaranjan Das as the poet of patriotism, prophet of nationalism and a lover of humanity, before long gave up active politics and started his *ashram* at Pondicherry for the spiritual ennoblement of humanity.

If the political mission of these leaders was over, there were others to take up the torch where they left it. There were groups of revolutionaries with a network of revolutionary societies spread over the country. Those who gathered around Barin Ghose's *Jugantar* soon merged their separate identities in one

body, which, I believe, was first labelled as the Jugantar Party by the Government, but the name was also generally accepted and these groups were welded into unity by the personality of Jatindranath Mukherji (Bagha Jatin), whose career is too well known to need recital here. The older Anushilan Samiti, with its various branches, retained its separate identity; it first worked under the supreme command of Pulin Das, but after his incarceration, had a kind of collective leadership consisting, if I am right, of men like Trailokya Chakraborty (popularly known as Maharaj), Rabi Sen, Pratul Ganguly, Nalini Bagchi, Prabhash Lahiri, Asutosh Kahali, etc. The most resourceful and intrepid revolutionary outside Bengal was Rashbihari Bose, whose career seems to be the fittest answer to Lord Curzon's short-sighted policy. The Partition of Bengal, mooted in a hugger-mugger in 1905, was annulled in 1911, but in 1912 the new Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, was the target of a bomb outrage in Delhi which had become the new capital of India. The Viceroy escaped untouched, and so did Rashbihari Bose, who had directed (and possibly also participated in) the 'operation', and who could safely reach Japan where some thirty years later he handed over the reins of his Azad Hind Sangh to Netaji Subhaschandra Bose. The wheel came full circle when, as a result of the interaction of many forces, most importantly the revolutionary movement sparked off by the Partition of 1905, Britain was forced to quit India in 1947. But Lord Curzon in the shades must have had the last laugh, for Indian independence was accompanied not only by the partition of Bengal but also of Punjab.

### III

What, one wonders, was Hemchandra Ghose doing all this time when the country was not only astir but ablaze with Swadeshi, boycott, fiery propaganda in the *Bande Mataram* and the *Jugantar*, manufacture of bombs and firing of pistols? Nothing—to the bystander who just watched the events of those days. As one looks back, one is struck by Hemchandra's reticence and inertia. As a leader, he seems to me to be a contrast to Barindrakumar Ghose—fiery, hectic, excelling in quick organization and instant action, but lacking in grip and tena-

city. Hemchandra Ghose, on the other hand, was a silent man who shunned publicity and would ponder and calculate before taking a step. He met P. Mitra when P. Mitra came to Dacca to start a branch of the Anushilan Samiti, which Pulin Das took over as Mitra's deputy. However, it is significant that Hemchandra did not join this Samiti but started a secret society of his own in 1905. It is also to be noted that although in 1901 Swami Vivekananda had inspired him with a message of service which had revolutionary undertones, he did not overtly do anything for more than three years. This was characteristic of the man who would look before and after, consider the pros and cons before taking a decisive step. Such precautions are particularly necessary in an organization that is revolutionary and secret, for otherwise it would certainly attract the attention of the armed forces of the Government, both military and paramilitary, and of all the civil agencies, open and covert.

In 1906 Hemchandra Ghose came to Calcutta where he met Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, the celebrated editor of *Sandhya*, a revolutionary daily. Brahmabandhab's last and first instruction to him was about the necessity of absolute secrecy. Hemchandra understood this so well that, not to speak of Government agencies, even friends and followers outside a small coterie did not know the name of the party for which they worked. Hemchandra started a branch of Mukti Sangha in Calcutta, putting it in charge of Srishchandra Pal with Haridas Datta and Gunen Ghose as coadjutors. It was during this visit in 1906 that he also met Aurobindo Ghose, Sister Nivedita, Bepin Pal and Satish Mukherji, the founder of the Dawn Society. He asked members of his party to work in collaboration with other parties and also seek the advice of other leaders, but they must maintain their separate identity. In order to supervise their work, he also occasionally used to come to Calcutta, and here he met two leaders who were to become famous at a later stage—Jatindranath Mukherji and Rashbihari Bose. This was in 1909-10. Another prominent leader was Bipinbihari Ganguly, whose Atmonnati (Self-improvement) Samiti was later merged in the groups that acknowledged the supreme leadership of Jatin Mukherji and coalesced into what is known as the Jugantar Party.

In those exciting days Hemchandra and his associates

seemed to hold aloof from the activities that were shaking Bengal. They had no journal to publicize their news, for the simple reason that they shunned publicity. Not one member of this group was an accused in the famous Alipore Conspiracy case which went on for a little less than two years from 2 May 1908 to 18 February 1910; neither had the party anything to do with the heroic but unsuccessful attempt made by Kshudiram and Praphulla Chaki; and whoever might have managed to smuggle revolvers to Kanailal Datta and Satyen Bose, they were not Hem Ghose's men. It is only when it was necessary to dispose of Nandalal Banerji, who had helped to track Praphulla Chaki, that on 9 November 1908 Mukti Sangha and Atmonnati Samiti joined hands and killed this infamous Police Inspector. Except for this solitary incident and another abortive attempt to be discussed later on, Hem Ghose's men remained somewhat aloof. Obviously the leader had other ideas and was maturing other plans.

Although Hemchandra Ghose has not set pen to paper and most of his immediate comrades have been equally reticent, it may not be difficult to give an idea of his role during this period. From the beginning he felt the value of silence and secrecy in the work of revolution and the necessity for recruiting the right sort of freedom fighters. The Anushilan Samiti and its proliferating branches and the Jugantar Party comprising various groups did splendid work in preparing a body of young men as ready to kill as to die, and the newspapers, *Bande Mataram*, *Jugantar* and *Sandhya*, had preached the cause of revolution amongst the educated. But there were several defects in organization and in methods of warfare. Arms were scarce, the bombs prepared by Ullaskar and Hem Kanungo did not always work, the white men aimed at—Kingsford, Bamfylde Fuller and O'Brien (to be mentioned again later on), for example—could not often be touched, and newspaper propaganda was a double-edged weapon which exposed those who used it as much as those who were the targets of attack. Above all, the indiscriminate extension of branches and the haphazard recruitment of volunteers made the organization vulnerable from within. The killing of the approver Naren Gossain by Kanai and Satyen inside the jail was a heroic feat and a marvel of strategy, but how could Naren Gossain get into the party at

all? Was he won over in jail or had he been planted in the group earlier? That there were black sheep already in the party was demonstrated by the case with which the police swooped upon it, simultaneously raiding five important centres on one and the same day (2nd May 1908): (1) 32 Muraripukur Road, (2) 38/4 Raja Nabakissen Street, (3) 15 Gopi Mohan Datta Lane, (4) 134 Harrison Road, besides (5) Sil's Lodge at Deoghar.

From the later activities of the group and from talks I had with some key figures, it appears that there were some other things which struck Hemchandra Ghose. First, it would be better to procure arms than to make bombs, which was a risky affair and left traces behind. Secondly, it was useless to kill a native Police Inspector or a Police Prosecutor or a spy because in a despotically governed country teeming with unemployed people, their ranks could never be thinned. Such victims were, therefore, not worth the powder spent on them, and by creating sympathy for their relations, their deaths would be counter-productive. But the reign of terror spearheaded by a few white men should be met by 'terrorism' equally effective and much more economical, so that this small knot of Britishers might be immobilized and others might be disinclined to leave their native shores to face the hazards involved in imperialism. I may add a bit of personal biography here. In 1929 I took up a temporary post at Presidency College in a vacancy reserved for an Englishman, but as the only Englishman who had applied for and been offered the job—a Mr King, if I remember the name aright—refused to come out at the last moment, I was allowed to continue and did continue. Thirdly, if Saratchandra's statement about the source of *Pather Dabi* is to be believed, Hemchandra Ghose must have realized—here his contact with Rashbihari Bose might have been an eye-opener—that attempts must be made to sow disaffection in the army, for that would shake the foundations of the British empire. And last and first, the right sort of cadre must be recruited: there must be no approvers and no confessional statements.

## Operation Rodda

As already stated, the Calcutta Branch of Mukti Sangha, in co-operation with Atmonnoti Samiti, managed to give an appropriate 'reward' to the notorious Police Inspector Nandalal Banerji who had recognized and pursued Praphulla Chaki and got a special honorarium of rupees one thousand from Government in recognition of his 'services'. Two men had participated in this venture—Srish Pal of Mukti Sangha and Rancen Ganguly who had been deputed by Atmonnoti Samiti. From the revolutionaries' point of view, it was a complete success, for Praphulla Chaki was avenged and Government could get no trace of Nandalal's assailants. This was in 1909. It was in this year that in course of one of his occasional visits to Calcutta Hemchandra Ghose happened to meet the great revolutionary Jatindranath Mukherji alias Bagha Jatin. What the two leaders discussed we do not know, but as will appear from the events to be narrated in this chapter, it was a momentous event in the lives of both the leaders.

We cannot say if the impulse came from Bagha Jatin who toured some villages in Jessore and other districts and also wanted to establish contact with revolutionary societies outside Bengal. But we now know that coming back to Dacca, Hemchandra confined himself to revolutionary activity in the village of Subhadya and tried to start a few branches in rural areas. From the villages might come pliable youths who would be trained into disciplined, dedicated volunteers. There were other advantages also for a revolutionary society if it could spread its influence amongst rural people and secure shelters in remote corners of the country. Hemchandra himself looked after the branches which had the Subhadya Society as their nucleus and directed Surendra Bardhan and Haridas Datta to organize

centres in North Bengal, particularly in those areas which were inhabited by backward classes in the districts of Dinajpore and Rangpore and beyond. Surendra Bardhan established his base in the village of Nageshwari and gradually with the help of Nilkamal Bairagi extended his activities amongst the Adivasis—particularly among the Huzong and Rava tribes—who were unsophisticated and yet very sensitive about the preservation of their local independence and the sanctity of their indigenous culture. To such people the message of freedom was expected to have a special appeal and Bardhan's activities had an appreciable effect. Two Rava recruits—Biren Rava of Paham village and Govinda Rava who hailed from Jolapara in Assam—became energetic organizers. Although, later on, Hemchandra Ghose diverted his activities into other channels, the Ravas did not forget the message of freedom instilled into them, and they did not fail the party in its hour of need.

In the Subhadya centre the organization was mainly in the hands of Rajendra Guha who had an able assistant in Natabar Das. These two carried on work mostly among the Majhis and lower castes in southern Bengal, arousing in them national consciousness and love of political freedom. But if we try to reconstruct the working of Hemchandra Ghose's mind between 1908 and 1914, that is to say, between the beginning of the Alipore Conspiracy case and the First World War, we can notice a shift in his ideas and also in the programme of his work. He had no part in Barin Ghose's organization, and if his lieutenant Srish Pal, with his permission, collaborated with Atmonnoti Samiti, the killing of Nandalal Banerji was not probably initiated by Hemchandra himself, though he could not but have approved of this punishment which the victim richly deserved. Mukti Sangha and Atmonnoti Samiti showed their tenacious zeal by embarking on another venture which, although it proved abortive, showed to what lengths these revolutionaries were prepared to go. At about this time there was in the Alexander Jute Mills of Jagatdal a very ruffianly engineer, Robert O'Brien, who treated native clerks and labourers very harshly. One day this bully kicked a clerk fatally but escaped with a fine of a paltry fifty rupees in the Magistrate's court at Barrackpore. The two secret societies decided that the right answer to the grievous injury as also to the light

punishment, which was an insult added to injury, would be life for life, and Robert O'Brien must be liquidated. But if this objective was to be achieved, O'Brien's movements must be observed carefully so that he might be caught unawares at the right place and the right moment. With this end in view Haridas Datta and Khagen Das—both of Mukti Sangha—were deputed to keep a close watch on the movements of O'Brien as a hunter stalks his prey. They disguised themselves as ordinary coolies and accepted employment in Alexander Jute Mills, but as even after working there for three months they could not fix on suitable time or place, they abandoned the attempt. For Haridas Datta at least, this three months' disguise as a coolie was not without its beneficial side. He managed to get into the good books of the surgeon in an American ship *S.S. Havildar*, and with the surgeon's help he got a job as a store-keeper and started on a sea voyage lasting several months. He had practised his hand in a daring exploit, he had mastered the art of disguising himself, and he now gained wide experience of the world. He was ready for a more momentous exploit which was not far away.

As a rule, in order to maintain secrecy revolutionaries, dedicated to a violent disruption of the established order, do not record their thoughts or plans in writing, and no revolutionary could be more secretive than Hemchandra Ghose. His ideas and plans have, therefore, often to be judged from subsequent actions undertaken by his followers. It seems that though he had spent some time, roughly from 1908-9 to 1912, in organizational work amongst tribal people and lower classes, Hemchandra felt that their support, while it might be ultimately necessary, should be preceded by an awakening among the cultured, politically conscious young men of the middle and upper classes from whom the hard core of his cadre must be drawn. Already in 1909 he had met Jatin Mukherji, an intrepid and resourceful leader with prophetic vision, an acute intellect and the will and ability to act. Later on, in 1913, he also met Rashbihari Bose, a leader comparable to Bagha Jatin, and with Bagha Jatin he came into contact again, at about the same time in 1913, but in peaceful social service, which was partly a preparation for revolutionary work and partly a screen behind which revolutionary leaders could discuss and mature



their militant plans. Jatin Mukherji and Hemchandra Ghose worked shoulder to shoulder in relief operations after the Damodar floods in 1913. It was in the course of this relief work that almost all the revolutionary societies outside the Dacca Anushilan Samiti came under the command of Bagha Jatin, who was by then accepted as the supreme leader of armed revolutionaries, and it was here that the Jugantar Party may be said to have been inaugurated formally, if such a term can be used of such societies at all. The volunteers of Mukti Sangha, who were organized by Srish Pal, Haridas Datta and Pratul Ghose, so greatly impressed Bagha Jatin by their discipline and dedication that as a mark of appreciation of their meritorious service, he sent to their leader at Dacca a rifle and a breech-loader gun—a somewhat curious recognition of peaceful, humanitarian work, but a significant pointer to the service he really expected of them.

## II

The work that lay ahead of these volunteers of Mukti Sangha and Atmonnoti Samiti, who were now acting in collaboration, reads more like an episode out of a romantic story than sober history. But here we have a proof of the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction.

Srish Mitra was a very small man indeed. He was a tally man or tally 'clerk' in the firm of R. B. Rodda & Co., who were dealers in arms and ammunition. A tally clerk is not a regular clerk at all; he finds employment only when imported wares are unloaded and he goes out to check the imported goods with the list supplied by the office. This, of course, happens almost daily, but I have seen regular office clerks looking down upon such employees as errand-boys. The nickname by which Srish Mitra was known to people about him was Habu, which means a 'simpleton'. As I am writing out 'Operation Rodda', it appears that it was on this impression of near-idiotcy that Habu capitalized when he converted a fantasy into an actuality. Nobody in the Company would take any notice of what this obscure manikin was busying himself about. But this Habu was a trained hand of Atmonnoti Samiti and a direct disciple of Anukulchandra Mukherji, one of its leading figures. Habu

conveyed the information that a large consignment of arms ordered by the Roddas was soon to arrive in Calcutta, and he even gave the exact date—26 August 1914—when they would be unloaded, and getting clearance from Customs House, he would have to lead the convoy of bullock-carts to the firm's godown. This information was given to Anukul Mukherji who passed it on for what it was worth to Srish Pal, whose brain, inventive and resourceful, at once chalked out a plan for seizing the consignment, which would be milk and honey for the starved revolutionaries eager for a fight but without the means to contrive it. A secret meeting which was convened at Chat-tawallah Lane was attended by many top leaders—Naren Bhattacharya (later on, M. N. Roy), Naren Ghosechaudhuri, Anukul Mukherji, Haridas Datta, Asutosh Roy (from Pabna), Khagen Das (from Comilla), Suresh Chakraborty (from Barisal), one Jagat Babu, a senior medical student, Biman Chandra—and of course, Srish Pal, who had taken the initiative in the matter and Srish Mitra, who now elaborated the information he had given and awaited the decision of his leaders.

Srish Pal thus outlined his plan to the assembled comrades. A large consignment of various articles was to be unloaded and carried to the firm of the Roddas, but the revolutionaries were interested only in fifty Mauser pistols, various connected parts, springs and fittings, some of them designed to convert pistols into improvised rifles, and also nearly fifty thousand rounds of ammunition, all these ordered by the Dalai Lama of Tibet. In a word, Srish Pal's idea was that the cargo meant for the Dalai Lama must be seized in its entirety by the revolutionaries, when at noontime it would be on its way from the Customs House, which was to the north-west of Dalhousie Square—now Binoy Badal Dinesh Bagh—to Rodda & Co., situated to the south of it, the front gate opening out to Vansittart Row. So in the busiest hour of the day the cavalcade, if we may so call it, would pass to its destination, with the two strongholds of the Government, the Writers' Buildings and the Government House, standing left and right and the Lall Bazar Police Headquarters looming from a distance of less than a hundred yards! 'Thou art mad to say it', exclaimed Naren Bhattacharya when he heard the proposal, and he left the meeting in a huff along with Naren Ghosechaudhuri and some others who agreed with him.

But others, more reckless, thought that such a golden opportunity could not be missed and the arms and ammunition must be looted at all costs. Soon Srish Pal got the assent also of Jatin Mukherji who was at this time like the generalissimo of the revolutionaries, of Pal's own chief Hemchandra Ghose, of Anukul Mukherji, Bipinbihari Ganguly and Harish Sikdar of Atmonnoti Samiti. Srish Pal, who was put in overall charge of the operation, proceeded ahead with the support of these towering figures.

The plan that Srish Pal, in consultation with Habu, had drawn up and now laid bare before his friends and the top leaders, was complete in every detail without any loophole anywhere. They were to direct the consignment of arms and ammunition meant for the Dalai Lama to the residence of Habu's *guru* Anukulchandra Mukherji, and from him the other leaders would get their share of it. Habu Mitra's routine duty was to take charge of sea-borne packages as they were cleared one after another from the Customs House, and so nobody would have any suspicion when he would do this normal duty on 26 August 1914. And it was part of his duty also to see if the packages unloaded tallied, item by item, with the list supplied from his office. After this checking, it was, again, his duty to reload these packages, with the assistance of Customs House coolies, on the bullock-carts he himself had hired. It is interesting in retrospect to see what a key position this petty clerk held just because of his insignificance, for no important official would demean himself to do work so trivial and yet—as Habu showed—so portentous. In a sense this petty clerk would be monarch of all he surveyed for a few fateful moments.

Srish Pal's idea was that Habu would hire six out of the innumerable bullock-carts then plying in Calcutta, driven mostly by Hindusthanis, men hailing from Bihar, U.P. and other parts of northern India. These carts would be loaded with all the packages except those ordered by the Dalai Lama, and proceed along the usual route, and these would be followed by another ordinary cart but not driven by an ordinary carter. Here the carter would be none other than Haridas Datta, the second man in Mukti Sangha, called by his brethren Mejda (the second brother), as Hemchandra Ghose was the universal Barda. Haridas Datta was a master of disguises. Did he not for

three months work as a coolie in Alexander Jute Mills in order to shadow O'Brien? Although they could not do any harm to O'Brien, neither could anyone in the mill area distinguish him from the hundreds of other Hindusthani coolies working there. Did he not have a sea-voyage in the disguise of a store-keeper on board an American vessel? And now he would play the perfect Hindusthani cart-driver—in appearance, dress, movement, speech, and cart-driving. Who could doubt his capacity for camouflaging—the other six drivers, the coolies, the Customs House people or the men in the street? As for Rodda & Co., he would not take his cart to Vansittart Row at all, but to Anukulchandra Mukherji at Malanga Lane where he would deliver the goods. But Malanga Lane was at a considerable distance from Dalhousie Square; how would Haridas Datta manage to take the cart even though he might successfully pass himself off as a cart-driver? Here, too, both Srish Pal and Haridas Datta disarmed the objections and fears of the assembled leaders. While engaged in organizational work amongst the Adivasis in North Bengal along with Surendra Bardhan, Haridas had learnt this craft, and he would be able to handle his cart and his bullocks as one to the manner born.

On 25 August 1914 Srish Pal took Haridas Datta to Prabhudayal Himmatsingka, later on well known in Calcutta as a solicitor and a public man, but then a young student living in a mess and a fellow-traveller of the revolutionaries. On 25 August 1914 Prabhudayal was asked to accommodate Haridas for the night and then on the morning of the 26th, give him the appropriate make-up of a driver of bullock-carts. A somewhat coarse, unclean *dhuti* must be procured for him and a loose vest such as was worn by cart-drivers. He must also have his hair close-cropped, and a brass pendent must be seen hanging from his neck. The bullock-cart he would drive would be supplied by Anukulchandra Mukherji, who as a political leader had a long connexion with the working classes of Calcutta, not excluding bullock-cart drivers who formed a considerable section of the city's population in those days.

Thus attired, Haridas Datta drove his cart and placed it just behind Habu's six carts standing in front of Customs House. Srish Pal and Khagen Das kept loitering in the distance like ordinary passers-by, with this important difference that they

carried, hidden from view, loaded revolvers, for their duty was to follow Haridas Datta's cart as security guards. At the appropriate hour Habu Mitra emerged out of Customs House with his coolies, who at the employer's instruction loaded the first six carts with packages in which we are not interested, and then put the boxes containing fifty Mauser pistols, springs, spare parts and an enormous quantity of ammunition into the seventh cart. The convoy wended its way towards Vansittart Row with Habu walking in front and Srish Pal and Khagen Das keeping up the rear. What a spectacle, indeed!

As the procession reached the south of Dalhousie Square, Habu led the first six carts along Vansittart Row, and nobody except him noticed that the seventh cart had lagged behind slightly, moving eastwards to the road between Manton & Co. and the Currency House—it was called Mission Row later on. Then it turned to British Indian Street, and after crossing Bentinck Street, it was deflected towards Malanga Lane, along Chandney Chowk with the buildings on the right serving as a kind of protective wall. As soon as the first six carts had reached the house of Rodda & Co. and the unloading began, Habu Mitra felt that he could slip out unnoticed. So before long he was by the side of Srish Pal and Khagen Das, and they all met Anukulchandra Mukherji who took charge of the boxes and arranged for their safe custody.

Everything seemed to 'fall pat' as Srish Pal had told his leaders, and the only problem now was to stow away Habu Mitra, whom everybody would search for—Rodda & Co. no less than police officials and detectives. The information he had given was like a windfall to the great revolutionaries, his neat dexterity their chief asset when the operation was under way, and now his insignificance was their greatest security. They had a plan ready here, too. The Roddas knew little about Habu, and he had not as yet become prominent enough to attract the attention of Intelligence agencies, but very soon they would be in full cry after him. Hemchandra Ghose, who had foreseen this, had asked Dr Surendra Bardhan of Kurigram to keep three safe asylums ready, and Srish Pal whisked Habu off to one of these hide-outs in Nageshwari Police Station. Srish Pal himself lost no time in returning to Calcutta to help in the work of distributing and concealing the arms so miraculously secured.

Few 'actions' in the entire history of the Indian revolutionary movement were more intricate, more daring and yet more neatly accomplished, and this achievement was due primarily to the ingenuity and courage of three men—Srishchandra (Habu) Mitra, Srishchandra Pal and Haridas Datta.

The action of 26 August 1914 completely bewildered the Roddas and the police. It was after waiting for about a week during which Habu Mitra never came to office and was nowhere to be found that his employers threw up their hands in despair, and the alarming realization dawned on the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta that within about three weeks of the commencement of a European War—in fact, it was the First World War—such an enormous quantity of arms and ammunition (fifty .300 bore Mauser pistols and 46,000 rounds of ammunition) had been spirited away by the revolutionaries. Not getting any other clue, the police began to arrest whomsoever they suspected as having had any contact with Habu. Not that this large-scale governmental adventure had not any effect, but the revolutionaries had got precious time in which they were able to distribute over a wide area the major portion of their large haul. Government believed that 44 of the 50 pistols had been quickly disbursed among 9 groups of revolutionaries, and of course, Government did not get any trace of the other 6. More than half the ammunition was similarly disposed of, but 21,200 rounds were stocked by Haridas Datta in a godown in Banstola area near the mess where Prabhudayal Himmatsingka used to stay at that time.

Embarking on a career of indiscriminate arrests on the only clue of a possible contact with Habu Mitra, the police laid their hands on one suspect after another, and in some places they seized some papers or materials which gave them further clues. In this way they arrested, among others, Anukul Mukherji, Kalidas Bose, Girin Banerji, Naren Banerji, Baidyanath Biswas, Upen Sen—and Prabhudayal Himmatsingka. Against Himmatsingka the police could not procure enough evidence, and thinking that they should isolate this Marwari boy from the Bengali revolutionaries, they externed him from Bengal. But Prabhudayal's arrest had a more momentous consequence. Scared by the appearance of so many policemen, the wife of a *durwan* pointed to a closed godown-room and blurted

out that a Bengali Babu had rented it but he was not seen since. Here was a clue worth a thousand and plainclothes policemen began prowling about the locality for an opportunity to pounce upon the Bengali Babu who was none other than Haridas Datta. When Haridas paid his next visit, which was not long after, and saw the ring of policemen encircling him, he knew that the game was up, but with unruffled presence of mind, he managed to drop into the drain the key of the padlock with which the godown had been secured, thus depriving his captors of any evidence that might directly connect him with the goods stowed inside the room.\* Haridas Datta was arrested then and there and sent up for trial along with others in what the Government called the Rodda Arms Conspiracy case. As the prosecution had little direct evidence, the proceedings dragged on for seven months, and at the end of it Haridas Datta was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for four years and Kalidas Bose, Naren Banerji and Bhujanga Dhar for two years each. Srish Pal remained in hiding for about two years and was arrested in 1916 when the huge supply of arms from the Roddas had done their work, having advanced, expanded and strengthened revolutionary work beyond the dreams of its leaders and having also exposed how vulnerable the splendid fabric of British Imperialism was.

Haridas Datta and Srish Pal returned to their comrades at about the same time after their detention but not Srish (Habu) Mitra whose exit was even more mysterious than his advent. As soon as Haridas Datta was arrested, Surendra Bardhan was alerted, for it might be necessary to conceal Habu in a deeper recess where the police would not be able to trace him. Bardhan, who was himself thinking along these lines—for he, too, was a suspect—sent Habu to live with the Ravas, a tribe in Assam, whom he and Srish Pal had tried to organize and who would be beyond the reach of Calcutta detectives. Dr Bardhan was soon arrested, and when after release he made enquiries after Habu, he was completely baffled. This boy, bred in the sophisticated

\* The above account of Haridas Datta's arrest I owe to Satibhushan Sen, an 'elder statesman' of the revolutionaries who raided the Chittagong Armoury. Satibhushan Sen, who was a detenu in the Buxa Camp, shared the same room with Hemchandra Ghose and heard the above story straight from Haridas Datta, another internee at Buxa.

society of the metropolis but possessing an extraordinary capacity for adjustment and an irrepressible longing for freedom, tended buffaloes in hilly regions and identified himself with primitive tribal life as if he had been born to it. He was particularly friendly with a daring Rava youth, and the two often went out on adventures, and one day he did not return. That is all that Surendra Bardhan could gather from the Ravas when he contacted them long after he had placed Habu in their custody. It was surmised that either he, always restless and indomitable, alone or with his friend had undertaken some daring exploit that had proved fatal, or he might have tried to cross the frontier and slip out into China, but was killed by the Border Security men on duty.

### III

Though Habu did not return, the revolutionary work of which he was the *primum mobile* had tremendous impact on the political scene, to which Government records and commissions bore ample testimony. 'Tiger' Tegart, later Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, said that between 1914 and 1917 the arms and ammunition siphoned off from Roddas were employed in 44 outrages in which 27 persons were killed and 44 wounded and the sum of Rs. 3,67,480 looted. The Rowlatt Commission on sedition, on whose recommendation a law was enacted for rigorously suppressing revolutionary activities—popularly known as the Rowlatt Act—accepted Government figures, adding that few, if any, revolutionary outrages had taken place in Bengal since 1914, in which Mauser pistols stolen from R. B. Rodda & Co. had not been used.<sup>5</sup> Surendranath Banerjca, the most eminent Moderate leader in Indian politics, described the Rowlatt Act as the 'parent of the Non-cooperation Movement',<sup>6</sup> and Mahatma Gandhi, who is credited with having led the country through Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements to independence, narrating before a British Indian Court how from a loyalist he became a Non-cooperator, said, 'The first shock came in the shape of the Rowlatt Act.'<sup>7</sup> This was in 1922. As we turn over the pages of history, noting its wrong emphases and frightful omissions, we think of poor



Habu Mitra, and wonder if the Rowlatt Commission would have been appointed or the Rowlatt Act considered necessary if Habu had not done what he did on 26 August 1914. Armed revolution would, then, have simmered for many more years with occasional flare-ups like the attempt on Lord Hardinge in 1912, and the ordinary law of British India would have sufficed.

In yet another way the Rodda affair has passed into history. I want to end this chapter by referring to the heroic end of Jatin Mukherji in a trench-encounter at Balasore in Orissa on 9 September 1915, where from a strategic position he and his four comrades held at bay a large contingent of policemen and military officers for 90 minutes until their last bullet had been fired. Jatin Mukherji had gone there to receive a sizable supply of arms from Germany sent by S.S. *Maverick*, but owing probably to inadequate intelligence service in Europe, the British had got scent of the consignment from Czech refugees who wanted to free their country from the Austro-German yoke (if I may coin the phrase). Jatin Mukherji and his men waited in vain at Balasore for the German ship which carried arms that would have enabled them to block the movement of British troops. Instead these five men found themselves pursued and encircled by a force that vastly outnumbered them. As they were baulked of their expectations, the principal weapon that remained with them was the Mauser pistol which could be sighted up to 500 yards. With this 'formidable weapon' they fought a last-ditch battle as long as they could and then it was all over. Historians have explored this heroic exploit, poets have sung of it, and the spot has become a place of pilgrimage. 'N.C.M.' has thus pinpointed the significance of the fray: 'The Balasore encounter, September the 9th, 1915, announced for Indian terrorism' [that word again] 'a new spirit—the passion for confrontation and clash. It was the first significant event in East India in a new category, of which those born here since the Mutiny had no direct experience and it shook up the country.' (*The Modern Review*, November 1978).

I find in this episode an element of irony which has not occurred to the many people who have rightly praised the dauntless courage of the martyrs and the infinite resourcefulness of their leaders. No one has said a word about the unknown clerk

who silently slipped out of the world so that others might fight and win their way to freedom. It is said that the world does not know its greatest men. How soon, I wonder, nations forget their noblest heroes!

## Old Wine in New Bottles

Anyone surveying the activities of Mukti Sangha and trying to gauge the ideas and plans of its founder-leader, will be struck by the alternation of vigorous activity and apparent somnolence. When Bengal was stirred to its depths by Lord Curzon's Partition and the Swadeshi and Boycott movement, Hemchandra was a hefty young leader of volunteers dedicated to the ideal of political revolution, and his centre of work was Dacca, the capital of the new province and also the hub of anti-Partition agitation. But beyond organizing a demonstration against Lord Curzon and fighting for a whole day against a body of loyalists who gathered to welcome the Viceroy in 1904, he did little, and even in the anti-Curzon fray the incentive really came from the eminent lawyer Anandachandra Roy, a moderate of moderates and certainly no votary of armed revolution. If Hemchandra and his men remained relatively quiet, it was because their vision extended far beyond administrative or fiscal reform. Neither did this party, as pointed out earlier, make any contribution to the agitation that culminated in the politics of the bomb practised by Barin Ghose and Ul-laskar Datta, and Hemchandra Ghose seemed to be untouched by the philosophy of national awakening preached by Sri Aurobindo.

Mukti Sangha collaborated with Atmonnotti Samiti in two isolated political murders—of Inspector Nandalal Banerji who had hunted down Praphulla Chaki (1908) and much later (1915) of an equally infamous officer named Murari Mitra whose detective skill led to the incarceration of Bipinbihari Ganguly, the founder of Atmonnotti Samiti. In this second action, Mukti Sangha's Srish Pal took the initiative, but he was assisted by the Atmonnotti Samiti whose representative Khagen

Chatterji was with him all through. Such sporadic activities pale into insignificance before Operation Rodda which, as pointed out in the preceding chapter, had far-reaching consequences. It is chiefly due to Hemchandra Ghose's overall leadership that the large haul of arms had been distributed amongst different groups—Government sources listed nine—not excluding Anushilan Samiti which had kept aloof from the spreading activities undertaken by the various organizations that had, after 1910 and more or less formally in 1913, united as Jugantar Party under the supreme leadership of Jatin Mukherji. It was a Mauser pistol fired by an Anushilan revolutionary that struck down Basanta Chatterji who had escaped two previous attempts on his life.

The Rodda operation and its aftermath marked a watershed in the history of Indian revolution. The European war had already started, and the British Isles faced a possible invasion. In a year from the beginning of hostilities, Jatin Mukherji tried to organize an armed revolt in India, and although the attempt failed and the leader met a heroic death, his spirit survived and continued to work through his followers. One effect of these aggressive activities was that the Congress in the historic Calcutta session of 1917 came definitely under the domination of extremists. One of the great revolutionaries, Naren Bhattacharya alias Manabendra Roy, a disciple of Jatin Mukherji, made his way to a top place in the world of international communism, and the other fighters for Indian freedom in foreign countries had also not given up their struggle. On the other hand, the British Government and their Indian representatives were throwing their net around these revolutionaries; the Government of India were anxious to enforce old laws like Regulation III of 1818 and eagerly proceeded to frame new statutes like the Defence of India Act (1915), and later on, the Rowlatt Act (1919). Sedition must not only be scotched but killed.

It is against this background that a survey must be made of what the Government did to Hemchandra Ghose or what Hemchandra Ghose thought and planned during these years, roughly from 1914, which witnessed both the outbreak of the war and the Rodda operation, to 1920 when peace had been established and as a part of general amnesty political prisoners

were, by and large, released from detention. As the police had little evidence against Hemchandra Ghose and very imperfect ideas about his activities, he was, at first, somewhat lightly dealt with. He was just 'home-interned' or put under house-arrest towards the end of 1914, a few months after the outbreak of the war. But in 1915 Government, considering him more dangerous, made him a state prisoner, that is to say, held him under Regulation III of 1818. He was first detained in Midnapore Central Jail, and then a year after, transferred to Hazaribagh jail. In 1917 he was first brought to Alipore Central Jail from where he was sent to Dacca Central Jail. From 1918 to 1919 he was for a year interned in the village of Mcherpur in Nadia district and then taken to Alipore Central Jail again. From here he was, along with other political prisoners, released in 1920.

This period of incarceration which lasted for about six years gave maturity and depth to Hemchandra's ideas and convictions and a new direction to his plans and actions. He remained the old revolutionary dedicated to the cause of wresting freedom by violent means, but he decided to change the mode of organization and the strategy of action. If we were to express this change symbolically, we might say that Mukti Sangha was dead, and B.V. or 'Bengal Volunteers'—the label by which the party was to be known afterwards—was born. But the change was only a development; it was like a rebirth of the fabled phoenix which is said to rise out of the ashes of its own dead body. Even from his early days Hemchandra was a voracious reader, and in prison or in internment, books were his best and sometimes his only companions. He read extensively in history and politics, particularly books dealing with political revolution. He had a tenacious memory which helped him to ruminate on what he read and also to shape his plans of action in the light of what happened in other countries. His memory, I have heard, was a treasure-house on which other people drew with confidence when occasion arose. Whenever there was any discussion or debate at which he was present, and his friends were puzzled about facts or dates, they would invariably turn to him and almost always got an answer that was precise, definite and illuminating.

## II

It is quite clear from the line of action subsequently followed by him that during these years of detention Hemchandra made a fresh survey of his old problems. He was not impulsive like Barindrakumar Ghose who thought that his mission was over when Hem Kanungo would have said that it had just begun. Neither could he in the manner of Rashbihari Bose try to tap the very valuable source of the Indian army, one of the pillars of Britain's Indian empire. And he respected from a distance, without trying to emulate, the heroic Jatin Mukherji who not only tried to sow disaffection in the Indian army but launched, with the promised help of German arms, an open attack on the British Government in India. Jatin Mukherji saw grand visions, planned on a vast scale and was personally brave and strong beyond the dreams of ordinary men. Yet, as I have already said, much as Hemchandra respected this great leader, Mukti Sangha stood aloof when several other groups banded themselves under Jatin Mukherji to form a single party. Its men would be Jugantar friends rather than a limb of Jugantar, for Hemchandra had seen that there was danger in collaboration even on a limited scale. There would be strangers in the other camp, and one would not know if all of them were equally reliable or responsible. There was also the risk that the other group would have the same handicap and the same uncertainty. Even the very successful Rodda operation revealed chinks in the foolproof arrangements made by Srish Pal, Haridas Datta and Srish Mitra. The police came late on the scene and made arrests indiscriminately, but even these random forays furnished them with valuable clues. Haridas Datta's arrest might be an accident, but not the arrest of Prabhudayal Himmatsingka, a Marwari student living in the depths of Burrabazar, far from the centre of political discontent. That showed that all the young men involved were not equally reliable or equally responsible. As Hemchandra thought and thought, he must have wondered if all his own men were thoroughly trained and thoroughly tested. If he had to weed the undesirables out, he must be in sole charge of the party, abjure all idea of collaboration and also change the method of recruitment and training. If this meant a smaller party and also fewer actions, so much

the better for the party and the actions it would undertake.

Other considerations also made the leader think of reorganizing the party and, strangely enough, of leaving out some of the best men, some 'tried comrades'. He knew that on account of the punishment meted out to approvers, informers and over-zealous police officials, some of them might be scared away or sulk in their dens, but their ranks would never remain unfilled. In a country where the spectre of unemployment is a grim reality in cities as well as in villages, informers and detectives would always be plentiful, and a proper resistance to the foreign Government could be organized if, as a first step, their Indian agents could be rendered harmless; that is to say, they were to be kept ignorant rather than liquidated. Killing a Nandalal Banerji or a Murari Mitra would be spectacular but would not be paying in the long run. The right way would be to make these people ineffective, to throw them off the scent or, in plainer language, to conceal revolutionary activities from them. This objective would not be difficult to attain, for already in Indian society these Indians lived like aliens, and for their own safety they were, at least in cities, huddled together in separate blocks; even their name was changed from C.I.D. (popularly expanded to 'Crush India Department') to I.B. (Intelligence Branch). What Hemchandra Ghose wanted was that the Intelligence Branch should grope unintelligently in the dark. Already he found that the Rowlatt Committee had no knowledge of Mukti Sangha, and although their report gave an elaborate account of the Rodda operation, they could say little about Srish Mitra.

On return from detention, Hemchandra started the work of reorganization by taking a drastic step. He laid the axe at the top, ordering that those whom the police had marked out as revolutionaries or those who had been convicted should have nothing to do with the party. They should get married and settle down with their families—Haridas Datta, Srish Pal and some others whose names figured prominently in police records. Most of these men, who had dedicated their lives to the cause of the country and were almost glued to the party, objected to this new dispensation which cast them off. Imagine Haridas Datta, who had driven the bullock-cart from the Customs House to Malanga Lane, settling down as a house-

holder and looking after bullocks that ploughed fields of paddy or jute! Or Srish Pal, who had liquidated Nandalal and Murari, exchanging a perilous life with a revolver in his pocket for the peaceful career of a tradesman busy with debit and credit! The leader, however, put down all these objections with a firm hand. He must first hoodwink the police and the authorities who control the police and then rebuild the party along new lines. Here he enunciated a new law which is reflected in section 25 of *Pather Dabi*, where, taking his cue from Hemchandra Ghose, Sarat Chatterji makes Sabyasachi recall that at a meeting in Canton two severe laws were passed, the substance of which was that the leader must never be disobeyed and that he must never even be criticized either to his face or behind his back. Such a Draconian law Hem Ghose, who was feared as much as he was loved, now formulated for his followers.

Haridas Datta was sent to Nageshwari where he started life as a farmer, and Srish Pal began carrying on trade as a rice merchant. Thus these men were pushed out of overt political activity, and to all intents and purposes, they lost touch with the party. At the leader's behest they got married, and were indistinguishable from ordinary householders. Such was the destiny chalked out also for many other soldiers of freedom—Rajen Guha and Khagen Das, for example—who had been convicted or kept in detention and were reported to have been prominently mentioned in police records. But what about the leader himself? He too seemed to have abjured politics altogether, and in order to demonstrate this retirement, he shifted to Calcutta where he lived the life of an ordinary citizen in the house of his elder brother Rameshchandra Ghose. At first the authorities were not convinced. They kept a watch over Haridas Datta and Srish Pal, both of them marked men, but when they could not connect them with any political moves or with the suspects of other parties, they abandoned the chase. The police were particularly reassured by the conduct of the boss who had cut himself away from his moorings at Dacca, who was never detected by watchers meeting his old comrades, and who spent his time reading newspapers, gossiping with neighbours and lustily playing dice, the hobby of idlers from time immemorial. So one good thing that the strong measures adopted during the World War of 1914 had achieved, so



thought the Intelligence agencies of the Bengal Government, was that Hem Ghose's party had gone out of existence.

It would be useful now to peer behind the surface and see what the leader was actually doing. He discovered with delight that some of his old comrades, senior members of the party, had altogether escaped the notice of Government agencies. Such, for example, were Krishna Adhikari, Md. Alimuddin (popularly known as Master Sahab), and Pramatha Chakraborti and Pramatha Chaudhuri. What pleased him more was that the two last-named colleagues had, during these dark years of arrest and detention, maintained a nucleus of the party which he could now renovate with their advice and assistance. This he could do the more conveniently, because by his first decision of eliminating released detainees—whether convicted or confined without trial—and by his self-imposed exile from Dacca, he had succeeded in producing the impression that his party had died a natural death. What pleased him still more was that this impression was shared even by other revolutionaries who did not take any notice of him or his associates, old and new. This enabled him to rebuild his party in a new way, according to his plans, and in perfect secrecy, undisturbed by police surveillance and unembarrassed by the association of fellow-travellers. Since he was almost forgotten, it did not surprise him, though readers today would be intrigued to learn this, that when in 1924, four years after the general amnesty of 1920, there were large-scale arrests and detentions, not one of his followers was touched, although they had by that time started a full-scale campaign for wresting independence.

### III

It will be convenient now to give an outline of the new plan evolved by the master, and then pass on to the new personalities that emerged. Hem Ghose asked his followers to start social and cultural organizations that would attract young boys but hoodwink old men. This, however, was a well-worn trick that might deceive others but not the police. But it did deceive the police also and for three reasons. The recruiting and training centre remained at Dacca, though the leader, whose programme was rigidly followed, was away in Calcutta. This might seem some-

what odd today when Dacca is the capital of a foreign country, but in those days hundreds of people would be daily travelling between what were the first and second cities of the same province. And of the two men who had kept the party alive during the lean years—Pramatha Chakraborti and Pramatha Chaudhuri—the former soon came to Calcutta, ostensibly for law studies, and was always in touch with the master. Secondly, some of the new recruits were really brilliant students of the university, most of them were interested in literary work, some were good musicians and others excellent gymnasts. Ordinarily such men are much too engrossed in their peaceful occupations to bother about violent actions. Gandhi's Non-cooperation movement, launched at the Special Congress in Calcutta in 1920, seemed to sweep the country, and although revolutionaries pledged to violence had their reservations about this 'phoney' attempt at disrupting an empire founded on force, they, too, encouraged this movement because whatever caused harassment to the foreign rulers was grist to their mill. But Hem Ghose's boys kept totally aloof; they might be too preoccupied to do full justice to their studies but they did not boycott schools and colleges which they continued to attend like faithful subjects of the British Crown. Besides, the leader himself liked brainy boys who could think clearly and plan intelligently and with precision.

The system of training that was handed down from above was that the trusted disciples should move about schools and colleges, cultural clubs and social service organizations in order to pick young men. When after continuous association, in which political propaganda would be directed towards the more willing listeners, a young man would be found suitable, he might be recruited, but he must be thoroughly tested before he was administered the oath of complete dedication, complete surrender to the master who was referred to as Barda, and also of complete secrecy. In this way every one of these chosen agents was put in charge of ten members forming a 'cell', and when many such cells would grow in a particular place, they would form a super-cell with a leader at the head. The leader of a cell would give his wards the appropriate physical and moral training and prepare them for acts of daring and self-sacrifice. In order to avoid confusion and maintain secrecy, these leaders at the grass

roots told their followers that they must not discuss affairs of the party even with members of other cells. The leaders of cells were free to meet the master, whose code name, as pointed out above, was 'Barda', who laid down policy from Calcutta though the main centre of recruitment continued to be Dacca with proliferating branches in other districts. Even though with the passage of time centres multiplied, the master insisted more on quality than on number, on discipline, dedication, daring and secrecy. The members of what I have called the super-cell would, according to convenience, meet in the darkness of night and take stock of the work done or draw up programmes for the future. They would also meet Barda in Calcutta and receive instructions from him, which they could do easily because, thanks to the novel but simple method introduced by him, neither the top men nor their followers attracted the attention of the authorities. For ten years the party grew from strength to strength—in patriotic fervour, discipline, self-effacing courage and, above all, in unflinching devotion to Barda whom many had not seen and only a few could have spoken to, but for whom all would readily face danger and death. How many of them even knew the actual name of this leader for whom they went to the gallows smilingly or received police bullets without a wince!

It was also lucky for the leader that he could get a body of organizers—for the sake of convenience I have called them cell-leaders—on whom he could rely with absolute confidence. I would name some of the more prominent amongst them here—Nisith Chaudhuri, Prabhas Ghose, Rasamoy Sur, Bhabesh Nandy, Praphulla Datta, Manindra Roy, Praphulla Mukherji, Dharani Bhattacharya, Suresh Chakraborti, Anath Aditya, Sushil Kushari, Satya Gupta and Bhupen Rakshitroy. These young men came from different classes, were brought up in different social surroundings, but almost all of them were intelligent and well-educated, and in the master's hands instruments equally pliable and equally reliable. With Bhupen Rakshitroy and Satya Gupta I had more than a nodding acquaintance, though they were revolutionaries and I was not. They were of about the same age, which was near my age, too. Both were M.A.s and both very close to Hem Ghose, who, I believe, depended on them with equal confidence. Yet how different they were! Satya Gupta seemed to me to be hot-

headed, volcanic and always in a militant mood; that is why all his life he was referred to as 'Major' Satya Gupta, although this rank was given to him temporarily when the Bengal Volunteers held parades during the Congress session of 1928 as a perfectly peaceful regiment of uniformed workers. I met him for the last time a year or so before his death (1966) when he had come under the influence of a Sadhu and was in ochre robes. At a meeting he insisted on my inaugurating some function or hall named after Netaji Subhas. 'But you are a Sadhu now!' I quipped. There was a flash of fire in his eyes as he roared back his answer: 'Well, I would throw off all this if the call comes again.' I smiled and proceeded to the rostrum to do his bidding. Bhupen Rakshitroy, on the other hand, was a soft-spoken, quiet man with a literary bent of mind, more inclined, I thought, to wield the pen than to hold the pistol. He was a prolific writer, and to my mind his writings are plaintively nostalgic and elegant rather than fiery or aggressive. But I have heard that he was one of the top men of the party, and at the time of planning and devising hazardous actions not less militant than the 'Major'.

At the head of these brilliant and dedicated young men stood Anilchandra Roy who deserves more than a passing mention. He seemed to have descended on twentieth-century Dacca from Renaissance Europe, the world of Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo, of Walter Raleigh and Francis Bacon. As a school student he was a neighbour of Pramatha Chaudhuri, who, attracted by this 'marvellous boy', introduced him to Pramatha Chakraborti. The latter made him a member of Sri Sangha, a cultural organization which, behind a façade of socio-cultural activities, was keeping alive the embers of Hemchandra Ghose's political party. Before long Anil was initiated into the doctrine of political revolution. A man of impressive appearance, he was a gymnast of exceptional skill. Neither a sculptor nor a painter, he was a musical prodigy displaying equal virtuosity in ancient and modern songs and also a talented instrumentalist. He mastered classical music and could sing Hindi and Urdu songs with equal ease and felicity. Himself a poet, he composed many songs and also set the compositions of others to appropriate tunes. He was a master of many languages and, having read for M.A. in Sanskrit, appeared in English in

which subject, too, he passed with credit. His proficiency in Sanskrit drew him to the mysteries of Hinduism, and at one time it was thought that he might join the order of monks at Belur, but he had already committed himself to the revolutionary movement, and in 1923, as head of Sri Sangha, he was put in charge of the secret political activities of the party now rejuvenated by Hemchandra Ghose. Here was a young man born to attract and command, but who by hard discipline had learned also to obey.

The system outlined above, although remarkable in many ways, had its limitations, for there was a wide rift between the followers at the level of action and the central leadership in Calcutta. Besides, the man who stood between the master and the 'field workers', if I may use this phrase, had only limited authority, and there were also chances of internal differences which have vitiated revolutionary societies not only in India but in other countries too. Much in these circumstances depended on the personality of the supreme leader who, like the King of the Dark Chamber in Tagore's play, would control everything from behind, keeping himself away not only from the gaze of police informers but also from contact with his own followers. And yet he must make sure that the members of the party embarked on overt actions which would be both hazardous and intricate, but no link in the chain must give way and there must be no chink anywhere through which Government agencies might peer. He must be an extraordinary man who took upon himself such a responsibility when the enemy at the opposite end was the vast British empire, which neither Napoleon nor the German Kaiser had been able to disrupt. As I try to reconstruct the personality of this man—whom I saw only once from a distance—from imperfect records, hearsay reports and interviews with disciples whose judgement is likely to be biased, I feel that the most remarkable quality of this dedicated idealist was his realism. When he acted in collaboration with other parties—he had met Jatin Mukherji and Rashbihari Bose both of whom were men of exceptional abilities—he must have noted how they failed in their task of winning over the Indian army men to the cause of revolution. Jatin Mukherji's abortive attempt to shake the loyalty of the Jat regiment stationed in Fort William in Calcutta was too recent an event to escape Hem

Ghose's notice, and the Balasore engagement, both heroic and tragic, convinced him how hazardous it would be to accept promises of foreign help at their face value unless one could keep control over the negotiations at every stage from beginning to end. And he saw, too, that though at great personal risk Rashbihari Bose was trying to keep the torch of Indian revolution burning in the Far East, he had not been able till then to accomplish anything tangible. So Hem Ghose did not touch these two departments of revolutionary activity at all. With the hindsight which is at our command now, I may say that he possibly looked upon himself as another John the Baptist, the forerunner of a greater person who would come after him and not only add depth and breadth to what he had accomplished but also attain objectives he had neither the resources nor the capacity to aim at. It is, again, his realism that made him see the complications that would arise if he joined hands with other parties who might have had a common end in view but held different ideas about the means.

Another quality which must have attracted his followers who stuck to him with unfaltering loyalty was his concentration or the very simplicity of his creed. Sri Aurobindo, even when he was the high priest of political revolution, could not, it seems, come down to the level of practical politics from the lofty spiritual plane where his mind soared and roamed. That may be one of the reasons why the two disciples or emissaries he sent to Bengal to start a revolutionary society here—Jatin Banerji (Swami Niralamba) and Barin Ghose—fell out within a few days of their arrival; possibly neither of them knew his mind. Aurobindo was very much impressed by Jatin Mukherji who was initiated into the revolutionary movement by 1903, but he asked this neophyte not to visit the Muraripukur Garden House which had been made the centre of revolutionary activities by his own disciples. We know that Barin also disapproved of Jatin Mukherji's visits to Muraripukur.<sup>8</sup> One finds the same mingling of incompatible purposes when one studies the character and career of the greatest revolutionaries on the other side of the road—Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, for example. Was he a saint among politicians or a politician among saints? Deshbandhu Chittaranjan, as far as I remember, could not clearly spell out whether he condemned—or com-

mended—Gopinath Saha who had murdered Mr Dey, mistaking him for Tegart. Other leaders of the Indian Renaissance, too, had mixed ideas; by revolution they would mean not only political upheaval but also social reform, conquest of poverty and removal of economic inequality. Not so Hemchandra Ghose. His eyes were fixed on one target—political emancipation of India by violent means. Saratchandra told me more than once that he had derived the substance of *Pather Dabi* from his contact and discussion with Hem. Saratchandra's hero states in clear terms that although there are other values, and some of them loftier and more permanent than political ups and downs, yet he does not care a tuppence for them, for his mind is irrevocably fixed on the violent disruption of British rule in India. That one purpose fills every pore of his body and mind; he does not merely live for it, it is the breath of his being. The same thing could be said of Hemchandra Ghose, and it is this complete absorption that evoked total surrender from his followers, far and near, because they had no difficulty in understanding him and his objectives.

Strangely enough, it is this simplicity, directness, forthrightness that invested this taciturn leader with an aura of majesty, and his followers, most of them intellectuals and some of them brilliant academics, viewed him as a man of imponderable depths. All of them felt that it was for them to do and also to die if necessary, but not certainly to reason why. Indeed, his directions, arrived at after long meditation, were so clear-cut that there was little scope for argument. More than three decades have passed since the attainment of independence, and there has been a good deal of rethinking about the freedom struggle, but I have never found any of his disciples, some of whom have died in peacetime, having second thoughts about their unquestioning loyalty to him. His rough exterior and his refusal to accept any personal assistance from anyone made him only the more awesome. I have heard only one man speaking flippantly to him, and he was none other than the great novelist Saratchandra. Once Sarat Bose, elder brother of Subhaschandra and a leading barrister of Calcutta, requested Hemchandra to take him to the novelist in his village home at Samtaber. The two took a train on a long summer day, and alighting at Deulti station, walked along the muddy village

road leading to the novelist's house. As they reached the house, Sarat Chatterji, who had no idea about this visit, exclaimed, 'Hem, killing Englishmen has completely addled your brain. Who but a fool like you would make this legal luminary, accustomed to metropolitan comforts, trudge along this difficult road on foot under a blistering sun?' Hem Ghose did not hit back, and the three sat together in the best of spirits.

I shall conclude this chapter by recounting two other anecdotes about this sombre, ruthless revolutionary. In 1948 I had to go to the Writers' Buildings daily for some months, because I was entrusted with the writing of two reports, one of which I wrote, and the other assignment I declined after examining the materials. At that time I heard much gossip which travelled from mouth to mouth. By then Hemchandra Ghose was a respected freedom-fighter, held in high esteem not only for his own contribution but also for his association with Netaji Subhas. The proposal emanated from somebody—the ex-revolutionary Bhupati Majumdar was then a Minister—that Hembabu needed looking after, for his elder brothers being now dead, he had few persons to call his own etc., and that free India's Government should take charge of a man who had done so much to make India free. When the proposal reached Dr Bidhan Roy, the Chief Minister, he is said to have remarked, 'Government would gladly do everything to keep Hembabu in comfort. But will he accept our offer? Who amongst you would broach the proposal to him?' And there the matter dropped. I heard the story possibly at the fourth remove, but the laconic query of Dr Roy, who had a spark of John-sonian common sense, and the silence of the original sponsors of the proposal are both so suggestive of the personality of Hemchandra Ghose that I have no doubt about the authenticity of the anecdote.

The other story I had from Binoy Sengupta who had himself a part in it. The members of the party are a well-knit group even now; they meet periodically, and once or twice a year they organize a festive get-together which they call 'Satirtha-Sanhati' (assembly of fellow-pilgrims). Here one of the items used to be paying obeisance to Barda, who attended these gatherings as long as he was able to do so. One of these festive meetings was held in the newly built house of a disciple who had



prospered in life. The host's wife, overjoyed at the master's presence, took a special dish to him and he declined shaking his head gently. Unperturbed, she came back, rearranged the food and was making a move to go to him again when Binoy stopped her, saying, 'You offered some food once and he has silently declined it. So far so good. If you go and press him again, you might find the skies falling about your ears. So leave the matter where it rests, and mind your own business. Don't try to touch the lion's mane again.'

## Years of Preparation, 1920–1929

It is said that the great scientist Sir Humphry Davy, the inventor of the Miner's Safety Lamp, was asked to give a list of his principal discoveries and inventions. He named some of them and then ended by saying that his greatest discovery was Michael Faraday. Making full allowance for the basic inappropriateness in the comparison, I would say that although Hemchandra Ghose, through the activities of what has now come to be known as the B.V. and his collaboration with Netaji Subhaschandra Bose, made an important contribution to the Freedom movement, in a sense his most significant achievement was his discovery of Anil Roy. But for the versatile talents and the organizing ability of this young man, his ideas and plans might have foundered, and he could not have kept the enemy in the dark as few revolutionaries have been able to do.

Anil Roy was born in 1901, and although he had been initiated into the cult of armed revolution quite early in life by Pramatha Chakraborti, he was then too young to make any substantial contribution. Hemchandra Ghose was hibernating in jail during the First World War, and Pramatha Chakraborti himself could have little idea of the plans the leader was maturing in detention. But there is what might be called the *sine qua non* of all revolutionary societies. A band of dedicated young men should be trained to take part in violent movements, and another primary requisite is that all activities should be kept secret. That is why secret societies generally work behind cultural, gymnastic and social service organizations, and it is on this account that their origins are somewhat obscure. During Hemchandra Ghose's absence, his followers effaced the name Mukti Sangha, lest this name, if once publicized, be traced to

the founder, and then woe betide the party and its members! The precaution was probably unnecessary, because even before Hemchandra's arrest, the name was not known outside a small, inner circle, and it never figured in police records. Be that as it may, in the early twenties these deputies started an innocuous organization called the Social Welfare League with night schools for adult education, but it was intended to be a cover for revolutionary activity also.

In the nationalist context of those days the English name Social Welfare League was looked upon with disfavour and was soon replaced by a new name—Sri Sangha, of which Anil Roy was a member. He had graduated with Honours in 1921, and I believe it was at about this time that he met Hemchandra Ghose on whom he made a profound impression. There was good reason for this too, for by then, thanks to Anil Roy's versatile tastes and unbounded energy, the Social Welfare League, which will henceforth be referred to as Sri Sangha, was throbbing with life, and Hemchandra not only appreciated its achievements but also its potentialities. Anil Roy studied for the M.A. in Sanskrit but changed over to English, passing out in 1923 with the highest marks in the paper on original composition. At the time of preparing for the examination, he borrowed books from a fellow student Lila Nag in whom he discovered a kindred spirit. Soon Anilchandra, now freed from the shackles of class lectures and examinations (though he had still to take his law degree), was put in supreme command of Sri Sangha of which he had already become the mainstay.

It is necessary now to refer once again to the plan Hemchandra had matured and to show how it took shape in Anil Roy's hands. The leader had left Dacca, seemingly a retired man who had abjured politics. But he had really started a new campaign in right earnest and wanted to control the party's burgeoning activities from Calcutta. If he was to succeed, he needed a deputy at Dacca, the base of his campaign, who understood his ideas and plans, but who had also the ability or initiative to take decisions on his own when necessary and keep the leader in touch with the progress of the movement. That alone would help maintain secrecy while ensuring uninterrupted development and expansion. Such a man was Anil Roy, then in his early twenties. It was he who would be in constant

touch with the leader in Calcutta, but he would be only the first among equals. The other cell-leaders, men in charge of cells of ten, who formed what I have called a super-cell, would meet Hemchandra Ghose when they had a problem to solve or had received a direction for which clarification from the master would be useful and desirable.

With his great organizing ability and enormous capacity for work, Anil Roy trained a band of dedicated young men the like of whom one would rarely find elsewhere. It is an open question whether book-learning and revolutionary activity can exist side by side. Maharashtra produced two great revolutionaries of whom the first—Shivaji—was an unlettered leader of irregulars and the second—Balgangadhar Tilak—was a scholar of whom any country or any age could be proud. We may leave this question out of consideration for the moment and watch the careers of the young men who gathered around Anil Roy who agreed with his leader that the most intrepid recruits of the party should come from the best students of Dacca and other towns. And that is how he embarked on his work. I was told by a member of the party that it was difficult for a good student in any one of the schools at Dacca to keep away from Anil Roy and his followers. It would be invidious to mention names or to distinguish the academic achievement or potentiality of one revolutionary from another. One example will suffice to show what stuff these boys were made of. Dinesh Gupta was less than nineteen when he stormed the Writers' Buildings accompanied by Binoy Bose and Badal Gupta. Along with his two comrades, he was selected for the action for his desperate courage, cool-headedness and sure marksmanship and not for his passion for books. He was no scholar but just a boy who had probably no time for academic studies. But those of us who read the letters which he wrote to his mother when he was under sentence of death were struck by their literary quality, and I think one day they may find a place in an anthology of Bengali prose.

Those who lived through the Swadeshi agitation and witnessed the growth of the revolutionary movement all knew that such activity was carried on behind a façade of social service, and educational or co-curricular organizations, particularly libraries and gymnasiums, which would languish as soon as the repressive machinery of the Government would be geared into

activity. That was not the case with Sri Sangha and its members. Their libraries were centres of learning where revolutionary youths found inspiration for fiery patriotism as well as food for hard thinking, and where students who were not revolutionaries gathered to read books or participated in literary or academic political discussions. The gymnasiums were places for real physical training where young men could improve their physique and patriots could learn discipline. Anil Roy was temperamentally so serious that his night schools were real schools where a genuine attempt was made to bring the light of learning to benighted peasants, carpenters, artisans and people of lower classes so that even if these hardworking men did not take part in revolutionary action, they could at least be imbued with political idealism.

The main centre of activity for quite some time remained the city of Dacca where there were several social service clubs—Santi (Peace) Sangha, Dhruba Sangha, etc.—but Sri Sangha directed by Anil Roy himself was ‘the very pulse of the machine’. He with his friends also established an excellent library called the Boys’ Reading Institute in 1923, which is also the year when, some people say, Sri Sangha was born, though I think it was, at least in its original name of Social Welfare League, a slightly older organization. Whenever there was necessity for social service—a natural calamity, a ceremonial occasion such as mass bathing in the holy river, or disturbances caused by local roughs—the volunteers of Sri Sangha would rush to the scene and do what was needful or even more than needful. In this way these volunteers moved very often from one locality to another and had opportunities for uninhibited social mixing. An important effect of this extensive programme of social service, serious studies and regular physical exercise was that governmental agencies were thrown off the scent. And the police had no idea of what boys like Binoy Bose and Dinesh Gupta were really being trained for—in fact they were indistinguishable from other boys—and what is equally significant is that they could not dream that Hemchandra Ghose had now any connexion with any movement at Dacca.

The real aim, however, was the preparation for armed struggle. On Anil Roy’s immediate assistants, Bhabesh Nandy, Manindrakishore Roy, Satya Gupta, Bhupen Rakshitroy,

Rasamoy Sur, Praphulla Datta, for example, devolved the responsibility of selecting boys fit for revolutionary work, and although many came few were chosen. The large majority of students, gymnasts and social workers had not an inkling of how the revolutionary cadre was being formed out of them but behind their backs, without their knowledge.

As I have already said, this revolutionary cadre consisted of cells or units of ten or so, each under a leader and the leaders formed a kind of super-cell at the helm of which was Anil Roy who controlled the entire organization. Except for special reasons, members of the cells, the subalterns, would have no contact with Anil Roy. This was in the interests of secrecy and discipline, the twin principles laid down by Hem Ghose. As time passed and suitable recruits became available in larger numbers, the cells multiplied, and the super-cell, consisting of men like Satya Gupta, Bhabesh Nandy, Bhupen Rakshitroy, Manindra Roy, Rasamoy Sur and Praphulla Datta grew into a larger body; but thanks to Barda's direction and Anil Roy's vigilance, there was no confusion or overlapping, nor any bickering, backbiting or recrimination. The recruits who were more academically minded were encouraged to pursue their studies and gain a good grounding in history, politics and the literature of revolution. Young men with a flair for daring acts and also combining coolness with courage were reserved for hazardous actions and given the training appropriate for this line. A third section consisted of young men who were at the same time wily, resourceful and reticent. They formed a kind of secret service, maintaining communications, gathering intelligence even from government sources and keeping watch where vigilance was necessary. It is in this way that the revolutionary cadre was built up at Dacca, and this served as a pattern when the organization proliferated to areas outside Dacca.

## II

At Dacca the organization fanned out in a way beyond the dreams of the founder who pulled the strings from Calcutta. Hemchandra Ghose, who was all his life a confirmed bachelor, never dreamed of drawing women into the hazardous path of armed revolution. Neither did any of his older associates—

Srish Pal and Haridas Datta in Calcutta or Pramatha Chakraborti and Pramatha Chaudhuri at Dacca. But as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, although man has a will, woman has her way. Lila Nag (b. 1900), daughter of Girish Nag, a deputy magistrate, was a girl with an academic and official background, but she had also an innate urge for dedicated service. She passed the B.A. examination of Calcutta University with Honours in English, standing first amongst girl candidates and winning the coveted Padmavati Medal endowed by the eminent jurist Rashbihari Ghose. In 1923 she stood first in the first class in English from Dacca where Anil Roy was one of her fellow-students. The two had a nodding acquaintance, because besides being fellow-students, they lived near each other, and when Anil Roy decided on changing from Sanskrit to English, he had to borrow books from Lila. Their results in the M.A. examinations in 1923 were indicative of their talents. Lila came out first in the aggregate but Anil got the highest marks in original composition, showing that he had the more creative mind whereas Lila was more persevering and constructive.

It was in 1923 that Lila started a women's club named Dipali Sangha with only twelve members, and at one of its Exhibitions which impressed Anil, they came somewhat nearer to each other. Anil at once saw the potentialities in Lila and her organization which he now visualized as the women's wing of his own Sri Sangha. As I have said, Anil seemed to have descended upon twentieth-century Bengal from Renaissance Europe, and his magnetic personality attracted Lila Nag as it had impressed Hemchandra Ghose. By 1924, that is to say, within a year of their meeting at the Exhibition, Lila was initiated into the cult of armed revolution, and Dipali Sangha did indeed become the women's wing of Sri Sangha. In 1925 Anil Roy introduced Lila Nag to Hemchandra Ghose.

Anil and Lila now became comrades in their social and cultural activities—and also in their revolutionary work. As I look at them from this distance of time—Anil died in 1952 and I never met either of them—I believe this combination was a kind of divine dispensation for the revolutionary movement. The two complemented each other, and henceforth one of them could not be thought of without the other. When they met at the Dipali Sangha Exhibition of 1923—they were of about the

same age—Anil was deeply immersed in the revolutionary movement, and Lila, though interested in social service, had no experience of political revolution. She had obviously thought only of women's education and emancipation, for she had joined the movement for women's franchise, started primary and secondary schools, a girl students' organization and a residential hall for girl students. But Anil Roy's was a dynamic, many-sided, magnetic personality that expressed itself in diverse ways. A practical revolutionary, he was also a mystic deeply engaged in religious studies. Although his principal occupation during this period was the violent disruption of the British Empire in India, he realized also that political freedom would be meaningless without economic upliftment of the masses whose poverty he saw in the raw when he met his pupils in the night schools. This naturally drew him to Marx, but Marx's thought was too materialistic to fit in with his lofty idealism. This led him to Hegel, the leading dialectician of European philosophy, who strove after a synthesis through the reconciliation of thesis and antithesis. Such a mind, active, agile but restless, required a steadying influence, the comradeship of one who, though not less intelligent or dedicated, was more practical and pragmatic and less of a visionary. Such a companion he found in Lila Nag, and if during this decade (1920–30) the revolutionary society, call it Sri Sangha or B.V., which grew out of the ashes of Mukti Sangha, established a firm base at Dacca, it was because the local leader Anil Roy had by his side not only a band of worthy colleagues but also the companion that he needed and who completed the connexion by becoming his life's partner sixteen years later in 1939 when their Sri Sangha and Dipali Sangha had drifted away from the B.V.

### III

Although the top leadership of the new organization was located in Calcutta from where Hemchandra Ghose kept a vigilant watch and sent instructions, the base was at Dacca, and as this base became more and more firm, Anil Roy and his confrères began to extend the sphere of their activities, establishing branches outside Dacca but on the same plan and system



that governed the central organization. But Hemchandra Ghose wanted to expand the party's activities only by stages and with great caution. Secret societies do not keep written records; yet it may, I think, be safely asserted that by 1928, when at the Calcutta Congress the name B.V. was publicly announced, it had branches in Midnapore, Burdwan, Mymensing, Faridpore, Comilla, and Noakhali, either in the district town or in the villages, and that it soon spread out to other districts also. It may be recalled that some of the most valiant soldiers of freedom, like Badal Gupta or Madhusudan Banerji, came from remote villages which had no links with urban society.

When the party had not only grown in size but given evidence of its capacity for organization, Hemchandra Ghose naturally thought of the second phase, that of action rather than preparation, and he also wanted to make wider contacts so that his efforts might be linked to the larger struggle for the final overthrow of the British rule in India. As he was totally dedicated to the mission of armed revolution, he kept aloof from Mahatma Gandhi's programme of non-violent non-cooperation, which in the twenties and thirties swept the whole of India. Later on, when on one occasion Mahatma Gandhi visited detainees in jail for a parley on their rival programmes of action, Ghose was no longer the unknown leader of a small group but a front-rank revolutionary; yet he himself kept away from the confabulations and deputed some of his followers who joined the talks but were instructed not to make any commitment. He meant no disrespect to the Mahatma who had united India as India was probably never united before or since. But he personally had no taste for what an elder leader had called the 'politics of mendicancy'.<sup>9</sup> Of the other national leaders in Bengal, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan was dead before Hemchandra Ghose had consolidated his own organization, and Deshbandhu, although a friend and advocate of armed revolutionaries, was not himself actively associated with them.

As Hemchandra, from a position of detachment, surveyed the arena of Indian politics, one outstanding figure attracted his attention, and that was Subhaschandra Bose whose acquaintance he hastened to cultivate. When and how they met first I have not been able to find out. But it is clear that they

were drawn to each other almost from the beginning of Subhaschandra Bose's entry into politics in the twenties, and their friendship and co-operation lasted till Subhaschandra's disappearance from Calcutta, which was largely managed by Hemchandra's men. I have already suggested in the beginning of this book that it is by working on what he had heard from Hem and what he had seen of Subhas that Sarat Chatterji's imagination drew the portrait of Sabyasachi, who, too, at the end of the novel departs in search of new avenues as Subhaschandra did in actual life.

In the political field Subhaschandra stood out as the uncompromising enemy of British Imperialism. He did join the Congress and was in the van of the Non-cooperation movement; he was generally dressed in spotless white *khadi* and wore a white Gandhi cap, his unsullied patriotism matching his unspotted *khadi*. For Gandhiji he had a kind of distant respect, but he was at heart unconcerned about or hostile to the group that had gathered around the Mahatma. For Subhas only one thing mattered—British Imperialism must be destroyed, lock, stock and barrel. If Mahatmaji could do this in a non-violent way, he would gladly accept the Mahatma's leadership. If not, goodbye to the creed of non-violence. This revolutionary zeal was absolutely impersonal. He would take anybody's help, accept anyone's leadership, and if his own leadership was the right step, he would shoulder the burden calmly. That is why he was indifferent also to the communal clashes made so much of in those days—by Hindus and Muslims and by the Government for whom it was the last stick or the last straw.

When after resigning from the Indian Civil Service (which he had not joined at all) Subhaschandra landed at Bombay, the first thing he did was to call on Mahatma Gandhi who directed him to place his services at the disposal of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das. Within a short time Subhaschandra made a deep impression on all around him by his fervid patriotism and his great organizing abilities. Mahatma Gandhi had brought revolution out into the open by proclaiming the Government in power as 'Satanic', but armed revolutionaries also noted with alarm his firm commitment to non-violence in which they had no faith, and they feared that his non-violent non-cooperation would ultimately slide into a negotiating round-table conference,

where the demand for independence would be nipped in the bud. As the extremists led by Balgangadhar Tilak had rescued the Congress from moderates like Surendranath Banerjea and Pherozeshah Mehta, who were content with gifts of administrative reforms, so the revolutionaries of Bengal and Maharashtra and Punjab concluded that if the Congress was to be weaned from the docile politicians surrounding Gandhiji—Motilal Nehru, Rajagopalachari and Rajendra Prasad—who would gladly swallow the bait of Dominion Status, their mainstay would be Subhaschandra, who was young, intrepid, agile, cool-headed and, above all, uncompromising. Having seen through the stalwards of the Congress, Subhaschandra on his part was anxious to meet the revolutionaries and see what assistance they could give him in an all-out fight with the British Government. It was with great satisfaction that he discovered in Hemchandra Ghose an ally as determined as he and also as clear-sighted. There were two things about this man which Subhas missed in other revolutionaries, great as many of them were. He had managed to hoodwink the Intelligence Branch of the police, for while his activities were fanning out from Dacca, he himself seemed to live in Calcutta as a retired man whose political life was behind and not before him. More importantly, Hemchandra Ghose had an army of trained volunteers comparable to Garibaldi's 'One Thousand'.

These two men would certainly have come together on their own, but their friendship was invigorated by Satyaranjan Bakshi who was connected with both. Bakshi was a nephew of Hemchandra Ghose, for his mother was a Ghose and belonged to the same village of Gabha and to the same family as the founder of Mukti Sangha. He had his school education at Gabha where Hemchandra had initiated him into the cult of revolution as far back as 1911. When Hemchandra was passing his life in detention, that is to say, from 1914 to 1920, Satyaranjan finished his education at Dacca and Calcutta, taking his M.A. in 1919; and then becoming an LLB, he was articled to uncle Rameshchandra Ghose, an advocate and an elder brother of Hemchandra Ghose. Rameshchandra, who soon discovered Satyaranjan's literary talent, political acumen and distaste for law, recommended him to Mahimchandra Halder, Basanti Debi's cousin and a frequent visitor to Deshbandhu Chittaran-

jan's house. This was in 1923. Having founded the Swarajya Party, Deshbandhu had, with the assistance of Mrinalkanti Bose, a well-known journalist, started a daily newspaper called *Forward* and had put Subhaschandra in overall charge of it. So the time was opportune, for Deshbandhu and Subhas were on the lookout for young men, competent, knowledgeable and imbued with nationalist idealism, who could help them in making the paper grow. Accepting Mahim Halder's recommendation, Deshbandhu sent a message to Satyaranjan, who met the great leader when he was closeted with two visitors who, he learnt later on, were none other than Motilal Nehru and Vithalbhai Patel, the two other top leaders of the Swarajya Party. Satyaranjan's first assignment was a column on Asian Federation, and before long he became the principal leader-writer on political subjects, then de facto editor and then editor in name as well as in fact. When, on account of circumstances which need not be recounted here, *Forward* was replaced by *Liberty*, there was no change of editor. Almost from the day Satyaranjan Bakshi joined *Forward*, he became the chief lieutenant of Hemchandra Ghose and Subhaschandra, and for a long time, eluding the surveillance of the police, he remained a key figure in the struggle for freedom which culminated in Subhaschandra Bose's disappearance from India in 1941.

I have known Satyaranjan Bakshi for about three decades, and though not an intimate, have a fairish idea about his character and abilities. Unimpressive in appearance, quiet and undemonstrative in his ways, retiring and reticent, he seemed to be unfit for the rough and tumble of politics—especially the desperate politics of armed revolutionaries. Yet his plain, soft exterior concealed a steely determination, an inexhaustible patience and a rare combination of foresight and hindsight which enabled him to conduct a daring action or a delicate negotiation with equal aplomb. And it was because he was neither flamboyant nor volatile but steady and firm that gradually both Subhaschandra Bose and Hemchandra Ghose came to rely on him as possibly they would not rely on anyone else. Subhaschandra himself testifies to another ability he discovered in the editor of *Forward/Liberty*—his flair for ferreting out official secrets,<sup>10</sup> and must have felt that if Bakshi could hood-

wink the authorities in one way, he might well be able to hoodwink them in another.

#### IV

When the party was securely established at Dacca and had at its command a cadre of intrepid, efficient volunteers, Hemchandra felt that along with spreading branches in districts, he and Satya Bakshi must strengthen the central organization in Calcutta, and even at the risk of attracting official attention, embark on propaganda and publicity. With these objectives in view Hemchandra Ghose and Satyaranjan Bakshi sent for two important members of the Dacca group—Satya Gupta and Bhupen Rakshitroy—who would thenceforth be stationed in Calcutta. These two men, as I have already said, were a foil to each other. Satya Gupta, fiery and dashing, was expected to inspire and marshal the soldiers of freedom, and the cool-headed and deep-thinking Rakshitroy would be more suitable for intricacies of planning, communication and diplomacy, and his literary talents might be used also for publicity.

Hemchandra Ghose had already recruited another young man whom he could press into service. This was Rebatimohan Barman who, although young in years, had a modest record of national work to his credit. He had, as a school student, joined Gandhiji's non-violent Non-cooperation movement and given up his studies. Obviously dissatisfied with that line of politics, he resumed his studies and in 1922 achieved the remarkable distinction of standing first in the Matriculation examination of the University of Calcutta from a school at Kishoregunge in Mymensing district (now in Bangladesh). When he came to Calcutta for higher studies, his soul still hungered for national service and of a more positive kind than what the Non-cooperation movement had offered him. And as he was just the type of intellectual and dedicated worker for whom Hemchandra was on the lookout, it is not surprising that they should meet and that he would readily accept the new leader. Many details in the history of revolutionary societies must of necessity remain obscure. I cannot retrace the course of Rebatimohan's political career or the development of his political thinking. The

fact remains that he joined the party in right earnest and carried on its work in the districts of Birbhum and Bankura. He also introduced the master to another dedicated political worker, Lalitmohan Barman of Comilla.

Hemchandra Ghose began to feel that the party should have a Bengali journal of its own for unifying the different branches now sprouting forth in various places and also for the edification of its sympathizers. Rebati Barman, a brilliant scholar, who had combined his university studies with revolutionary activities, was now in Calcutta, ready to take up the pen in furtherance of the cause of revolution. So a Bengali monthly *Benu* (Pamboo-flute) was launched in 1926 with Rebati Barman as manager and Mohanlal Ganguly and Satikanta Guha as joint-editors. The name 'Benu' suggested soft, tender music but the content of the paper was to be vigorous revolutionary propaganda. Soon after, Bhupen Rakshitroy was made editor and Rebati Barman was transferred to organizational work. The sponsors of the journal knew that it would attract governmental wrath, but they knew, too, that the time of confrontation was soon to come and it would no longer do to sit behind the fence. The journal was brought out in an atmosphere relatively quiet, but the situation soon became explosive. In 1922 Mahatmaji had been sentenced to six years' imprisonment, and he was due to be released in 1928. Although on grounds of health he was actually released four years earlier, he thought that he was morally bound not to take an active part in anti-government movements until the full term was over. On the other side, in 1927, the Conservative British Government, somewhat unexpectedly, appointed the all-white Simon Commission to submit proposals for administrative reforms in India. Administrative changes were due for consideration in 1929, ten years after the inauguration of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, but the Conservatives possibly wanted to forestall the Labour Party which, they feared, would be in office in 1929. The Simon Commission was condemned alike by moderates and extremists, who unitedly decided on boycotting it. A non-official All-Parties Conference was arranged in 1928, and a small committee presided over by Motilal Nehru was directed to draw up an agreed constitution for India. While the Madras session of the Congress in 1927, which Gandhiji attended more as an observer than as

a participant, had passed a resolution in favour of independence without going into details, the Committee presided over by Nehru proposed Dominion Status within the framework of the British Empire as India's political goal. The views of the British Conservatives were well known. To them the notion of Dominion Status for India was fantastic, and it was openly said that the Indian agitators should realize that since every four shillings in the pound of an Englishman's income came from India, no Indian politician then alive was destined to see India enjoying the status of a self-governing Dominion. 1928 was thus a crucial year in Indian politics. The Simon Commission was deliberating on the quantum of reforms the British Government might dole out to India, but the Nehru Committee had already proposed Dominion Status which would not be acceptable to British vested interests. But would resurgent India 'rousing herself as a strong man after sleep' accept it? That was the question on the eve of the Congress session to be held in Calcutta in 1928 under the presidentship of Motilal Nehru himself. What was more significant was that Mahatmaji's self-imposed semi-retirement being over, he assumed leadership again. What lead would he now give to young India shaking her 'invincible locks'?

The critical moment had arrived and the men were there. Not only were Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Motilal Nehru there along with the old guard of the Congress—the never-failing members of the Working Committee—but also present were Jawaharlal Nehru, Secretary of the Working Committee, and Subhaschandra Bose, representatives of the younger, more militant section of the Congress. Subhaschandra Bose knew very well that he must test the mettle of the army that Hemchandra Ghose had built up and also be ready for a confrontation with the champions of compromise. Hem Ghose was ready with his cadres and Subhaschandra Bose observed their alertness, agility and sense of discipline in controlling one of the most crowded and stormy sessions of the Congress in what was even then the largest city in the Empire outside London. Satya Gupta was there with his assistants and followers, now publicly presented as 'Bengal Volunteers' with appropriate military style ranks for the officers. There was also a sprinkling of outsiders, the most memorable of them being Jatin Das—here 'Major'

Jatin Das—who would soon attain eternal fame by his death through hunger-strike in Lahore Jail. I call him an outsider because of his deeper connexion with Sachin Sanyal's group and also with the Hindustan Republican Army of Bhagat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad. His presence at the Congress and the important role assigned to him are suggestive of Subhaschandra's links with the sprawling world of armed revolutionaries in all parts of India. We who were not in the know of things thought that it was all a big show, signifying nothing. We could not even dream that these young men were ready for an armed struggle and that the springing Bengal Tiger had his 'gory claws' as much as the British Lion.

Inside the pavilion there ensued a tense and tortuous drama, and none knew till the last moment—and not even then—how it would end. In spite of the resolution passed only a year ago in favour of Independence, the Working Committee wanted to adopt the Nehru Report, because Mahatma Gandhi thought that it would strengthen his hands in his parleys with the Viceroy and the British Government if he could put forward a demand which the whole of India supported. The two leaders of the younger section, Jawaharlal and Subhas, were not inclined to limit their demand for independence to a mere Dominion Status, which was bound to be further watered down in course of Gandhiji's *pourparlers*. But Gandhiji secured their consent too, because as Secretary to the Congress Working Committee Jawaharlal could not oppose its decision and Subhaschandra was himself a signatory to the Nehru Report. So the Subjects Committee decided on adopting the All-Parties Committee's recommendation of Dominion Status.

Jawaharlal Nehru's support at this stage did not count for much because he had no following outside Gandhiji's. But Subhaschandra's support or opposition was a different thing, for he had a following which, though at that moment not as large as Gandhiji's, was yet considerable and might pose a serious threat to Gandhiji's authority. The saint, who was also a politician, knew it but he, too, was not prepared for the aftermath. Subhaschandra kept his own counsel. It was not for nothing that he had gathered the Bengal Volunteers who had shown their mettle, and he knew he could also depend on their leaders, particularly on Hemchandra Ghose. He knew, too,



that besides these known extremists there were a large number of identifiable and unidentifiable delegates who would support him even against the Mahatma. He decided on moving an amendment (in favour of Independence) to Gandhiji's resolution accepting Dominion Status within the Empire. Mahatmaji was visibly upset and expressed his annoyance saying, 'If you cannot keep your word unaltered for twenty-four hours, then do not talk of Swaraj.'

What the Mahatma did not see is that the resolution he himself now moved went back on the resolution passed a year earlier, to which he referred only to abrogate it. Secondly, his resolution proposed that if the British Parliament just 'accepted the resolution' without giving any idea of how and when it would be given effect to, the Congress would *abide by it in toto*, which meant that its hands would be completely tied. It is this temporizing that Subhaschandra wanted to forestall by his amendment. It might be useful at this distance of time—after a lapse of fifty years—to recount Gandhiji's main resolution to realize the difference between his strategy and Subhaschandra's, both of whom made last minute changes. 'While reaffirming allegiance to the Independence resolution passed at the Madras session, it [the Congress] approves the draft constitution [proposed by the Nehru Committee] because by and large that is acceptable to all the different parties in the country. If the British Parliament accepts the Constitution within December 31, 1929, then the Congress will abide by it in toto. If, however, Parliament rejects it or does not approve of it, then the Congress will launch a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience . . .' and thus the resolution with its burden of conditional and concessional clauses proceeded haltingly to the goal of independence.<sup>11</sup>

The proposal of Dominion Status was a gesture to the British Parliament which was not in the 'giving vein' at all. So although Mahatmaji's resolution was passed at the open session, nothing came of his pacifist gesture. But the rider he added at the last moment about what the Congress would do in case the proposal were rejected worked wonders. After the Lahore Congress of 1929, there was no option left for the nation but to adopt the vow of Independence, and ever since 1930, January 26 has been observed throughout India as the anniversary of Indepen-

dence day. It was refreshing to see how from 1930 to 1947 the National Flag was hoisted on Government buildings in spite of stern opposition from the authorities. I know that in many buildings the flag was surreptitiously unfurled in the early hours of the morning by the illiterate menials who had been especially instructed to guard the premises from intruders who might try to enter with the forbidden flag. It is in this way, through this flag and vow, that the message of independence began to permeate all strata of society. It is, however, doubtful if all this would have happened so swiftly if Subhaschandra had not insisted on pressing his amendment in 1928. Although the amendment was lost, it showed his tenacity and also gave the neo-moderates an idea of his following. The nation has remembered with gratitude Mahatma Gandhi who, true to his word, launched his country-wide Civil Disobedience movement in 1930 and proceeded, stage by stage, to the Quit India Resolution of 1942. But we should not forget the armed revolutionaries, the Bengal Volunteers and others, who, too, renewed their programme of armed aggression and who kept their powder dry when in the forties orthodox Congressmen, weary of 'direct action', were anxious to higggle and bargain not only with the foreign usurper but also with secessionists and reactionaries at home.

## The B.V. Strikes—A Conspectus

Mahatma Gandhi made the Congress pass the Independence resolution in 1929, and Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the National Flag early on the morning of New Year's Day in the biting cold of Lahore. But as Subhaschandra points out, although Jawaharlal Nehru presided over the 1929 session, the real President was Mahatmaji, who realized that a struggle was in the offing and that Subhaschandra Bose would be an inconvenient colleague for a leader irrevocably wedded to non-violence. So he saw to it that Subhaschandra was left out when the new Working Committee was formed. The Mahatma's argument that in the coming struggle Congress leadership should work with unanimity might be morally defensible or it might be sheer casuistry, but was it democratic? In the previous session of 1928, when there was an open confrontation between the sponsors of Dominion Status and those of Independence, the former won by 1350 votes to the latter's 973. So when the Independence resolution was passed, the 'Independencewallahs'—the phrase is probably Mahatmaji's own coinage—should have had at least 6 places in a Working Committee of 15. But they had none. What might cause surprise is Jawaharlal's attitude, for he was a professed leftist, and also, as President, committed to making a fair deal. But Jawaharlal had not become President 'in the ordinary way' through nominations of Provincial committees or by formal election at the A.I.C.C. Mahatmaji had proposed his name at the last moment, and in a spirit of resignation the A.I.C.C. accepted it. As Nehru himself noted in his *Autobiography*, 'I did not come to it by the main entrance or even a side entrance; I appeared suddenly by a trap door and bewildered the audience into acceptance.'<sup>12</sup>

By taking over the Presidentship, Jawaharlal Nehru sur-

rendered his personality without, as was usual with him, knowing that he had done so and that he had also paved the way for a more sumptuous reward that would come eighteen years later. Almost his first act after election, or appointment as President was to endorse a 'joint manifesto' accepting the Viceroy's proposal of a Round Table Conference which, he pointedly notes, Subhaschandra Bose refused to sign. That is the difference between the man of ideas and the man of phrases, who admits that he was talked into signing it,<sup>13</sup> and very soon even these scruples ceased to trouble him. Although the Lahore Congress passed the resolution of Independence, the word soon vanished from the deliberations of the Congress, being replaced by the more mouthful phrase 'the substance of Independence'. Gandhiji now began to speak of *Poorna* Swaraj, thus adding an adjective hitherto unused in this context. I wonder if Tilak had claimed a fractional Swaraj as his birthright!

I do not want to denigrate the politics of Mahatmaji, neither do I want to minimize his contribution to Indian independence. I want only to emphasize one important aspect of the freedom struggle with which the apostle of non-violence had nothing to do, and it is in that context that I have to make unflattering remarks about one of the greatest figures in world history and also about Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru whom he won over by the offer of Presidentship of the Congress. After this surrender, Jawaharlal abandoned the leftists and with Gandhiji's blessings, eventually rose to be the Prime Minister of free India. So far as the Congress is concerned, Subhaschandra was left in the wilderness until he fought his way to the Presidentship of the Congress, only to be thrown out again.

After the passing of the resolution in December 1929, Mahatma Gandhi started the Civil Disobedience movement by marching to Dandi and preparing salt. The movement spread over the whole of India, and the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, who, even according to Subhaschandra, was a well-meaning man,<sup>14</sup> felt that mere repression was no remedy for discontent so widespread. After a year of disobedience and retribution, Gandhiji and Irwin entered upon a Pact in 1931 for whatever it was worth. But that was not the way with armed revolutionaries who believed that the Britishers would not yield an inch unless they were forced to. Already the Punjab wing had

avenged the fatal *lathi* charge on Lala Lajpat Rai by shooting dead a police official named Saunders, mistaking him for Superintendent Scott, who they thought was responsible for the heinous crime, and then there was the dropping of bombs in the hall of the Legislative Assembly when it was in session in New Delhi. In Bengal, partly by coincidence and partly as previously planned, the whole of 1930 was marked by sensational raids undertaken by different groups. The most spectacular and thrilling of these was the Armoury Raid at Chittagong on 18 April which was followed by a pitched battle on Jalalabad hill and other incendiary incidents. The whole thing appeared to be more like a protracted war than a sporadic explosion. Then on 25 August 1930, the people of Calcutta were startled to hear of a broad daylight bomb attack near Dalhousie Square on the car in which Charles Tegart, the redoubtable Police Commissioner, was going to his office. Tegart escaped and, most unfortunately, one of the assailants died from the explosion of the bomb thrown by him at Tegart. Six years earlier, in 1924, Gopinath Saha had killed an Englishman named Ernest Day, mistaking him for Tegart, who seemed, indeed, to have borne a charmed life. This was like the Kingsford-Kennedy affair of 1908, in which Kshudiram and Praphulla Chaki had killed the wrong persons. Four days after the abortive attack on Tegart, Lowman, Inspector-General of Police, was shot dead and a superintendent of Police, E. Hodson, seriously injured at Dacca by Binoy Bose of B.V. About four months after this adventure, Binoy with two other members of B.V.—Dinesh Gupta and Badal Gupta—dashed into Writers' Buildings and killed Colonel Simpson, Inspector-General of Prisons.

## II

The actions undertaken by the B.V. men will presently be described in detail. The two other actions were also part of the Freedom struggle but undertaken by other groups of revolutionaries. That the actions of different parties synchronized and were undertaken immediately after the somewhat tame sequel to the adoption of the Independence resolution was not a mere accident. The leaders had suspended their activities so that Mahatmaji's non-violent campaign might not get mixed up

with their militant, murderous raids, and so that Mahatmaji, with whom they wanted to co-operate, might not be embarrassed. But now they found that not only had Mahatmaji's non-violent non-cooperation failed to bring Swaraj, but he himself had begun to trim his ambition and a day might come when his 'substance of independence' would coalesce with the 'progressive realization of self-government' promised by the British Government. No wonder these different revolutionary groups had come to a tacit understanding that they must now pursue their own path.

In spite of this general agreement, these leaders seemed to be guided by varying immediate motives. The Chittagong affair was less an isolated assault than a campaign involving raids, skirmishes and assassinations. But it has seemed to me that even in the beginning there was a mixture, perhaps a slight confusion, of motives. I was at Chittagong when Surya Sen, sentenced to death, was in jail awaiting execution and there was a heroic but abortive attempt at a rescue, and also at the time when he was hanged. I still remember how daily I was searched thrice on the way as I proceeded from my residence to my college. This was then the rule for all passers-by. I asked people then and I have recently asked a senior adviser of the party—now a retired octogenarian—what Masterda's immediate objective was in embarking on this heroic expedition. I heard then that the revolutionaries wanted to hold by force the entire white population, uproot part of the railway line connecting Chandpur with Chittagong, and keeping the Britishers—administrators as well as commercial magnates and their dependents—as hostages, compel the Government to arrive at a satisfactory settlement with national leaders. In the account of the Chittagong uprising written for Arun C. Guha's *Indian Revolution*, Benode Chaudhuri, himself a participant, says that the plan was to overpower the district authorities at least for some time, and make Masterda the first President of Free Chittagong; the lives of the Europeans were to be 'forfeited' as a retaliation for the oppression on our unarmed citizens.<sup>15</sup> The word 'forfeited' hides an ambiguity. Were the Europeans to be killed outright or held as hostages or tried by a revolutionary court? The third explanation was suggested to me by the above-mentioned veteran

who was himself offered the judge's office. Another and a more acceptable version of the aims of the revolutionaries is that they wanted to strike a heavy blow at governmental installations and then die fighting to the last man.

After the initial success, Masterda was in fact proclaimed first President of Free Chittagong but immediately after this the revolutionaries were in disarray. They had taken possession not only of the main Armoury in the town but also of the Auxiliary Magazine at Pahartali, a suburb where they were pursued by the District Magistrate who fled as soon as the assailants opened fire. But the revolutionaries who seized the .303 guns in the Auxiliary Magazine did not know that the boxes containing cartridges were in another building. So they had to come away with guns which they could not use when the occasion arose. This shows that well-organized as they were, their intelligence service was fatally imperfect. Equally serious was the decision to break up the party into two groups which never met. The two commanders who were in charge of the operations were separated from Masterda and the main body of followers, who waited in vain for those two lieutenants who alone knew what to do and where. When these two men—Ganesh Ghose and Ananta Singh—returned to the appointed place of meeting, they did not know that in the darkness of night they had passed by their comrades who after vainly waiting for them had fled the town. Now within hours the initiative passed on to the district authorities who, armed with machine guns and other weapons, pursued the main body of raiders. They, under the leadership of Masterda, took shelter on the top of Jalalabad hill where a pitched but unequal battle was fought, for the musket rifles used by the soldiers of freedom were no match for the machine guns in the hands of Government troops. It was a heroic encounter resulting in heavy casualties for the raiders, and it seems that the other side must also have suffered crippling losses. The Government troops did not press home their attack and retreated from the hills they were climbing and could have occupied. Masterda and his surviving companions left Jalalabad hill, intending to wage a guerilla type of war. The other group of four—the two commanders and their two companions—made a hazardous journey to Calcutta from where they escaped

to a relatively safe shelter in the French township of Chandan-nagar, only to be surprised a few months later by Tegart and his gunmen.

An ideal fulfils itself in many ways. Though the action miscarried, its impact was tremendous and I, an outsider, can bear my own testimony to it. When I was at Chittagong three and a half years after the affair, I saw how abnormal its normal life was. As I have said, every day passers-by would be searched at street-crossings, young men under twenty-five had to carry identity-cards, the Commissioner and the Magistrate, the two top men of the administration, lived in greater seclusion than a condemned prisoner in a cellular jail. When arrangements for the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of King George V were being made, I had to attend one or two meetings called by the District Magistrate in his hill-top bungalow, but the host himself had not the courage to face his guests who might include—who knows whom. The secretary of the Celebrations Committee, a barrister who was also the Government Counsel, told me that the poorest response came from the prosperous European commercial community. Why? Not that they lacked loyalty to their King but they, too, knew that such celebrations were a mockery in a place where the most unpopular name was that of the King-Emperor. As officer in charge of the College at that time, I took part in these celebrations only to realize what a doddering system we were paying homage to. The Britishers had exhausted their resources by letting loose some miscreants to go on the rampage after the murder of Khan Bahadur Ashanullah, a top brass of the Intelligence Branch, on 30 October 1931. But although the Hindus had, as I learnt, a nightmarish time for a day or two, besides paying—‘loss upon loss’—Rs. 1 lakh as collective fine, there was no further communal disturbance and no bitter trail left because the Hindus knew that it was all the work of a few hooligans and that Muslims in general had stood aloof. What struck me as remarkable was the respectful aloofness maintained by Muslims, Buddhists and, I believe, the majority of Anglo-Indians. They might not have participated in the Armoury Raid but neither did they help the Government in any way. A knowledgeable revolutionary told me that with the single exception of the Kalarpole incident, the police received no assistance from Muslims, and even at Kalarpole they ob-



tained a clue only by accident. In a district where the rural area was mainly inhabited by Muslims, Surya Sen, now separated from his followers and with a large prize on his head, was in flight from point to point and from hamlet to hamlet, pursued from all sides by policemen commanded by British officers whose helplessness was admitted by Governor Sir John Anderson, the man who had organized the Black and Tans in Ireland. With the whole area honeycombed with military and para-military camps, it would not have been possible for Surya Sen to elude his pursuers for nearly three years if he had not had the silent and, I have heard, occasionally active co-operation of the Muslims of rural Chittagong. In short, I may say that this awakening of the masses and this near-complete segregation of the alien imperialists was the positive gain of Masterda's heroic adventure.

The abortive attacks made on the life of Sir Charles Tegart by Gopinath Saha in 1924 and by Anuja Sen and Dinesh Majumdar in 1930 belong to a separate category. As I have said earlier, these would recall a similar attempt made on Kingsford's life by Kshudiram Bose and Praphulla Chaki and a later attempt in 1930, the year under review here, on the Inspector-General of Police, Craig, by two followers of Surya Sen—Ramakrishna Biswas and Kalipada Chakraborti. Craig had come to Chittagong to supervise police operations against the revolutionaries who, not unexpectedly, wanted to retaliate by taking his life. It was an irony of fate that in the dim light of early dawn Ramakrishna and Kalipada shot Inspector Tarini Mukherji, mistaking him for Craig. This raises a problem which is not only one of morals but also of revolutionary strategy. If people like Mrs and Miss Kennedy and Mr Day are killed by mistake in place of Kingsford and Tegart, can the plea of the end justifying the means be said to excuse such killing of innocent people? Both Kshudiram in 1908 and Gopinath Saha in 1924, who were otherwise unrepentant and went cheerfully to the gallows, expressed regret that they had spilled innocent blood just as they also felt disappointed that the villains—Kingsford and Tegart—had escaped. The public reaction also must have been mixed. Much as patriotic Indians might praise Kshudiram and Praphulla Chaki and Gopinath Saha, they could not but feel distressed when innocent people were thus

killed. True, these victims too belonged to the race of oppressors and such murders might have a symbolical justification. Some such plea was put forward by Miss Bina Das, who at the Convocation of Calcutta University in 1932 had fired ineffectually at the Governor Sir Stanley Jackson. In a statement she read out at the trial, she stated *inter alia*: 'I have no sort of personal feeling against Sir Stanley Jackson the man. He is just as good to me as my father; but the Governor of Bengal represents a system which has kept enslaved 300 millions of my countrymen and country-women.' By destroying this symbol of tyranny and embracing martyrdom, she wanted to invite the attention of all to the situation created by the measures of the Government and to put an end to her own mental anguish. Bina Das's sentiments were noble, her action hazardous and heroic, but it was ineffective. As I recall those days, I think the Chancellor was far off from her and the shot had little chance of hitting the target. The symbol and the empire were unaffected, and the Vice-Chancellor Hasan Suhrawardy who stepped between the assailant and her intended victim got a knighthood!

I admit that the attempts on Kingsford and Tegart were of a different kind. These officials were notorious for their oppressive ways and the boiling wrath of the revolutionaries found concrete expression in the murderous attempts on their life. The first political murders of this kind were those of Rand, a very uncivil civilian and his associate Lt. Ayrst at Poona in 1899, and the first martyrs were the Chapekar brothers and their comrades. At Poona Damodar Chapekar dealt out condign punishment to Rand and also took revenge which Bacon defines as a kind of 'wild justice'. It is the same kind of punishment and wild justice that Kanailal Bhattacharya dealt out to Judge Garlick who had sentenced Dinesh Gupta of the Writers' Buildings raid to death.

These reprisals, however heroic, raise far-reaching problems in revolutionary ethics and psychology. There are good Englishmen and bad, just as there are good men and bad men in all countries and at all times. Now if the oppressive officials—Rand and Scott and Tegart—deserve to be punished, the converse proposition has to be accepted, that is to say, good officials—judges like Sir Lawrence Jenkins or Viceroy like Lord Ripon—

should be loved and honoured. And this leads to a philosophy of compromise between good government and self-government, which is unacceptable to the genuine revolutionary. When from ethics we come to practice, we find that many attempts misfire: Kennedy's carriage is bombed rather than Kingsford's, Saunders is mistaken for Scott and Ernest Day for Charles Tegart. A martyr's death is a consummation devoutly to be wished, but if the culprit escapes and an innocent man, sometimes an Indian in place of an Englishman, is victimized, 'then murder's out of tune and sweet revenge grows harsh'. Such a vendetta is open to objections on other grounds also. Selective assassination of individuals leave the imperial system intact, unless the vendetta is planned in such a way as to make the system itself unworkable.

In spite of these objections, some of them fundamental, the sporadic murders and assassinations had one desired effect, and they were not the less effective even if the attempt on occasions failed. As I have already said, these scattered incidents roused a kind of terror amongst the rank and file of European officers. After the assault on Professor Oaten, Subhaschandra Bose was expelled from Presidency College, but Oaten could not return to the college either. He was transferred to the Secretariat and after a spell as Assistant D.P.I., became the D.P.I. superseding officers senior to him. I know it was said even by members of the I.E.S. that it was good for him to be kicked down by a student, because this discomfiture led to his being 'kicked upwards'! The successive attempts made by armed revolutionaries in the late twenties and the early thirties in different places, notably in Bengal and Punjab, had one very visible effect. British officialdom was seized with panic and seemed to have a premonition of the coming end. If one compares Dinesh Gupta's letters to his mother with those of R. Douglas to his brother,—both written at about the same time, 1930-31—we see the difference between a courageous young man cheerfully contemplating his end and a craven administrator dying many times before his death. I shall just reproduce one sentence from Douglas: 'The relevant fact is that my life is in real and serious danger.'

The most glaring example is that of Charles Tegart, a formidable and redoubtable officer who wanted to terrorize those

whom he branded as terrorists. He was not just a Commissioner of Police, but might be likened, in point of ruthlessness and arrogance, to a much greater man—Winston Churchill. Churchill once said, referring to Indian political agitation, that he had not become His Majesty's first minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. That was Tegart's attitude too. It was his mission to stamp out rebellion and preserve the Empire that was to him a part of divine dispensation. He approached his task less as a Police Commissioner than as an Inquisitor-General. His ruthlessness aroused revolutionaries of all groups, and Government soon discovered that he was more a liability than an asset, for the security arrangements necessary for him were as expensive as those made for the Viceroy. So it was decided to relieve him of his duties and repatriate him to England. But sending him back was a hazardous affair, for the 'terrorists' might have their agents even inside police headquarters! So his exit was kept a top secret. I can quote the words of an Accountant-General, then a junior Assistant Accountant-General, my friend S. M. Banerji, who was then looking after the payment of salaries of gazetted officers. One Saturday the Burra-Sahib, an Englishman, sent for this Assistant Accountant-General, who may now be allowed to give his own version: 'Suddenly as if he remembered something, he asked me if the passage registers of non-Indian officers entitled to the Lee Commission concessions were being properly maintained and passage certificate forms were kept in my personal custody in the iron safe . . . then he took me to his ante-chamber and asked me in all seriousness and confidence whether I could bring the seal to be stamped on a certificate without seeing for whom he was issuing it . . . He said it was top secret, and he hoped he could depend on me not to divulge anything to anybody.\* For two or three days Mr Banerji felt that his movements and the visitors to his office were being watched by some plainclothes men who, he surmised, were police agents. The mystery was cleared when soon after, that is to say, on the following Tuesday or Wednesday, he read in the newspapers that Sir Charles Tegart had left the shores of India, and then from the registers, now sent back to his custody, Banerji saw that he had

\* I am quoting from an elaborate account of the episode written by Banerji for this book.

boarded one of Mackinnon Mackenzie's ships at the Calcutta Port, and Government had released the information of his departure only when he was safe on the high seas. So 'Tiger' Tegart, who had hunted 'terrorists' with crusading zeal and demoniac energy, now fled the scene like a hunted fox with the tail between its hind legs. Indeed, he was so terrified that he did not even dare to take the usual route of a train journey to Bombay, and then board a ship there for what was then a swifter passage to England.

This incident of Tegart's flight and the perusal of the letters Douglas wrote to his brother give us a clue to Hemchandra Ghose's thinking and the operations of the B.V. directed by him. Tegart was a ruthless tyrant and Douglas was a relatively harmless man. But individual differences are immaterial where a system is to be uprooted. Open confrontation with an enemy as powerful as British Imperialism is out of the question unless the help of an external power is available, which is possible only when Britain is at war. And when Hemchandra Ghose had been set free in 1920, the First World War had just ended and the Second was not in the offing. Guerilla war was not suited to a vast country like India. As history shows, guerilla warfare thrives best when the area is small and the guerillas have an operational base in jungles or in hills. Anyway, that was not the line along which Hemchandra Ghose's thoughts moved. His plan was to hinder and hamper the administration, and if his own plan succeeded and other parties took it up, they might paralyse the system. Here the individual peculiarities of a Britisher were of no account. Historians with their attachment to conventional morality speak of Lowman and Tegart in the same breath as 'notorious' policemen who deserved to be punished. But that is not true, neither does it represent the point of view of the 'Bengal Volunteers'. Lowman and Hodson were just top policemen who must be made to feel that they were insecure every moment of their life. Col. Simpson, I.G. of Prisons, was, as far as I could gather, a colourless sort of person, and when he was killed, Indian officials wondered if he was the real target of Binoy, Badal and Dinesh. But this was quite in line with Hemchandra Ghose's thinking which agreed with Subhaschandra's views too. Whether a British bureaucrat was a good man or a tyrant was immaterial. He must

be made to feel insecure, and his movements must be blocked at every stage. It is well known that after the corridor fray of 1930, the majority of British 'lions' in Calcutta spent their time between two cages—in the Writers' Buildings by day and in the United Services Club by night. The B.V. was not interested in awarding punishment or taking reprisal. One example will suffice to bring out what was most characteristic of this movement. Dinesh Gupta, who was sentenced to death by Judge Garlick, was a cent per cent B.V. boy, but the daring young man, Kanailal Bhattacharya, who shot Garlick to avenge Dinesh's death was not of this group at all. The B.V. acclaimed Kanai's patriotic act, but only as the removal of a foreign ruler, and if one judge dies in this way, another would shake in his shoes. That was all.

After Lowman, Hodson and Simpson, the B.V. turned their attention to district magistrates—Stevens at Comilla, and Peddie, Douglas and Burge who were killed in quick succession at Midnapore. The last three actions were so daring in conception and so neat in execution that they sent a shudder through the spine of the Governor himself, who is said to have asked a new Indian recruit to the Civil Service just posted to Mymensing, 'Is Mymensing in Midnapore?' And on learning that it was not, His Excellency congratulated the young man on his lucky posting!

The B.V. organization now directed its attention to the President of the European Association—from officialdom to the other pillar of British Imperialism. It is well known that it was to protect their trading interests that the Britishers took up the administration of the country and the Empire was born. The commercial magnates continued to exercise their influence through the Chamber of Commerce and the European Association. I have heard from a knowledgeable Englishman that it was partly because successive Viceroys wanted to get away from the dominating pressure of the European commercial community of Calcutta that the capital was transferred to Delhi. The B.V. men selected as their next target Edward Villiers, the President of the European Association, and they also noted with delight that some of their confrères were aiming at another pillar of imperialism, the *Statesman*, its editor Alfred Watson being the target of two unsuccessful attempts. The

attack on Villiers too miscarried—the only unsuccessful venture of the B.V. in its wide-ranging onslaught on the citadel of imperialism.

Here, in conclusion, I must say a word in praise of the accomplished technique of the B.V. cadre. Their intelligence service was almost perfect. They knew to the minutest detail when Lowman and Hodson would visit the Mitford Hospital at Dacca, and their marksmanship was amazing. Here, for example, Binoy Bose shot at both his victims from a considerable distance and not a bullet missed the target. James Peddie was an efficient administrator who wanted to ameliorate the condition of the people of Midnapore, as he wanted also to suppress ruthlessly both 'terrorism' and civil disobedience. And yet when two teenagers shot him fatally in an exhibition at a school, not a dog was present to bark at the assailants. The assault on Sir John Anderson in far-away Lebong was a marvel of planning, topographical knowledge and also of marksmanship; and if the Governor escaped, it was because on that day the gods were on his side, for the bullet that hit the Governor was diverted by the large button of his ceremonial coat and a nervous visitor accidentally falling on one of the assailants prevented the firing of a second shot.

## ‘Arms and the Man’—Virgil

The Calcutta Congress of 1928 was a kind of watershed. Mahatmaji, the soul of the organization, who had been more or less a silent spectator in 1927, had now taken up the reins again, and he was besieged with requests to become the President also. The Simon Commission, an unwelcome imposition for all shades of political opinion, was nevertheless busy with its deliberations, and patriots, reformist or revolutionary, began waiting in expectancy for the Trojan horse that was in preparation. Armed revolutionaries, whom for brevity's sake we may call Bengal ‘terrorists’, had more or less suspended their activities in deference to Mahatmaji's wishes. Not that they accepted either his philosophy or his methods, but they had respect for his personality and character, and being realists, they could not but recognize his tremendous hold on the masses. But they noted with dismay that the Independence Resolution of 1927 had petered out into a demand for Dominion Status, and they were not surprised that all that Mahatmaji later on proposed was a march to Dandi to break the trivial Salt Law. The difference between Gandhi-ites and their ‘terrorist’ opponents is most luridly brought out if we compare what a distinguished journalist, an admirer of Mahatmaji, said with the vitriolic comment made by an imaginary character in Gopal Halder's powerful novel *Ekada*. The long trek of 249 miles from Sabarmati to the sea-coast undertaken on 12 March 1930 evoked universal enthusiasm, and if I remember aright, Ramananda Chatterji, editor of the *Prabasi* and *The Modern Review*, prophesied that the spots where Mahatmaji and his seventy-eight followers would halt would in later times become places of pilgrimage like similar spots mentioned in the *Ramayana* and the



*Mahabharata*. From this panegyric turn to the musings of Amit, the haunted hero of Gopal Halder’s *Ekada*:

As Amit contemplated the Dandi March then in full swing, he was reminded of his one-time comrade young Sunil whose path was illuminated by a blinding flash that hides everything else from view. This fervid restless boy, if he heard of the march, would have laughed it away, saying ‘Bapuji! Yes, and his battalion of monkeys! The right army for the right general.’

It would be unfair to attribute this view to the writer of the novel, but it correctly represents the attitude of Binoy, Badal and Dinesh and other young men who believed in the violent overthrow of the British empire in India.<sup>16</sup>

## II

The revolutionary leaders in Bengal now felt that it was time for them to act. Sometime in 1929 Surya Sen met Hemchandra Ghose secretly in Calcutta and unfolded to him the outlines of the contemplated uprising in Chittagong, which was to come off a year later. Hemchandra Ghose warned him about the necessity for absolute secrecy, adding cryptically that when he acted he would find comrades in other places in action too.

For some time Hemchandra had been busy setting his own house in order. Although he was more or less satisfied with the cadre that had grown in strength and numbers, he had had disturbing news too, and his own private visits to Dacca confirmed his suspicion that all was not well with the main centre controlled by his chief lieutenant Anil Roy. Anil was a man of versatile talents which pulled him in different directions, and in these diversified activities he was encouraged and assisted by Lila Nağ, the leader of the women’s wing. For the true revolutionary, cultural activities—drill, literary studies, night schools, social service—were only a means of attracting recruits and a cover for concealing disruptive programmes. But Hemchandra found to his dismay that at Dacca cultural activities were absorbing too much energy and what was circumstantial was swallowing what was essential. The leader was now bent upon

taking a decisive step. He met Anil Roy and firmly spoke out his directive: the party must concentrate on political revolution and wean itself from all other activities which, however valuable, must wait. One may recall here that this was the ideal of Satyananda in *Anandamath* and of Sabyasachi in *Pather Dabi*. Anil Roy hesitated and wanted a few days' time to ponder. The leader noted the hesitancy and forthwith announced his decision. In his view the work of cadre-building and preparation had consumed many years, and as the time for action had all but arrived, there must be no facing-both-ways. So Anil Roy and Lila Nag, although they had done valuable preparatory work, must leave a party that was vowed to political revolution and could make no room for so-called constructive work. Here there was a parting of the ways, and here Anil Roy vanishes from this narrative also. Of the important figures in the party all remained with the master, except Bhabesh Nandy who stood aloof, taking possibly a middle path equidistant from Hemchandra Ghose and Anilchandra Roy.

As there is a good deal of confusion in the public mind, and maybe in official or historical documents too, I want to set the record straight as far as I have understood it. The original name Mukti Sangha had been forgotten through sheer desuetude. After the advent of Anil Roy and Hem Ghose's return from incarceration, it had emerged into new life, but possibly for the sake of secrecy it was not given any new name and might conveniently be referred to as Hemchandra Ghose's party. The formal separation that now occurred made the situation quite clear to the partisans, but for some time the label 'Sri Sangha' was loosely used for both the groups. From about 1928 Hem Ghose's party was rechristened the B.V. (Bengal Volunteers) and it single-mindedly pursued revolutionary action and had little to do with Anil Roy's Sri Sangha and Lila's Dipali Sangha, which developed their cultural and revolutionary programmes in their own way. Although both the groups owed allegiance to Subhaschandra Bose, as did many other groups too, the twain—B.V. and Sri Sangha—never met again. If I am not mistaken, Haridas Datta, the bullock-cart driver of the Rodda venture, whom the master had sent out into the political banishment of domesticity, now returned to the party, for by this time the police had forgotten him, and he could give his

young comrades his guidance and also the benefit of his experience in various fields.

The party now had a cadre of determined, disciplined, dedicated volunteers—who had given ample demonstration of their training in their parades and marches during the Congress session of 1928 under Subhaschandra, who as the General-Officer-Commanding had four Companies directed by the four Majors—Major Jatin Das of immortal fame ('A' Company), Major Satya Gupta ('B' Company), Major Benode Chakraborti ('C' Company) and Major Pratul Bhattacharya ('D' Company). Major Chakraborti and Major Bhattacharya disbanded their Companies immediately after the Congress session. Jatin Das, as is well known, was connected with other revolutionary groups—Sachin Sanyal's party in U.P. and, further north, with the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army of Bhagat Singh, Sukdev, Rajguru and Chandrasekhar Azad. With his arrest and, later on, death through hunger-strike in jail custody, the 'A' Company went into automatic liquidation.

Only the 'B' Company under Major Satya Gupta remained, which was now joined by Jyotish Joardar, another Major. These two fiery, resourceful young men were both ex-members of the University Training Corps where they had mastered the mechanics of shooting with pistols and revolvers. For some months they held military exercises and parades which were so strenuous that one of the participants, Anil Roychaudhuri, who could not stand the rigours of route-marches, died of sun-stroke. Some days after this incident these physical exercises were discontinued, and Hemchandra Ghose thought of 'action' in the proper sense of the term, that is to say, lethal attacks on 'white men' so that they might be scared out of the 'burden' of ruling over coloured people. So he asked Satya Gupta and Jyotish Joardar to stop their exercises and formed an Action Squad consisting of Haridas Datta, Supati Roy, Rasamoy Sur, Praphulla Datta and Nikunja Sen. These men were to direct whatever ventures the party would undertake in Calcutta or outside. As in terms of the new arrangement Supati Roy and Nikunja Sen had to shift to Calcutta, the organization at Dacca was henceforth looked after by, amongst others, Haridas Sen, Bibhuti Chaudhuri, Debu Bhowmick, Nirmal Bose, Bhola Basak—and, most notably, Biren Ghose.

## III

The Action Squad referred to above set about its work in right earnest. The leader wanted some 'action' even in 1930 to mark his reorganization of the party and also to signalize the protest of the revolutionaries against Gandhiji's watering down the Independence Resolution, by excluding Subhaschandra from the Congress Working Committee and by drawing up a programme which seemed to aim at the 'substance of independence' without independence itself. The first problem that faced Haridas Datta, Supati Roy and others was the problem of money. Action in the present context meant planned liquidation of Britishers so that the administrators and their champions might be seized with panic and the administration paralysed. But though they had a trained, dedicated cadre, the second important requisite was lacking—money; money for frequent, secret, roundabout journeys from place to place; money for sheltering absconders and, above all, money for buying arms from smugglers. Hemchandra Ghose was not very much in favour of political robberies. Not that he had any conventional scruples of conscience, but the most remarkable feature of his character, apart from singleness of purpose, was a rare combination of caution and daring. Robberies are often clumsily executed on account of a number of unforeseen circumstances, and as they require a good many participants, the police easily find clues. That is why he asked the Action Squad to limit political lootings to a minimum. The Squad committed only four robberies, all very neatly, involving a few trusted hands that would leave no trace behind them.

The first haul was made at the village of Mulchar in the district of Dacca. On 6 June 1930 at about 3 p.m., under the leadership of Madhu Bancrji, four students of Banari High School, then a centre of secret political activity, held up the overseer who was carrying cash from the local Post Office to the Head Office. He had to yield his bag to the raiders who decamped with it noiselessly. There was no row, nor any trace of the men who hurried away after smoothly executing their work. One of these young men was Badal Gupta. The second venture was equally sudden and swift and equally successful. Some members of the B.V. who were or had been students of Dacca

Intermediate College knew that the durwan regularly carried cash to and from the College without any escort. One day, under directions from the Action Squad, some volunteers just snatched the bag meant for the bank and vanished. When the Principal informed the Police Chief and cartloads of policemen arrived, the snatchers had melted away.

The other two robberies were more complex affairs managed by Nikunja Sen who was then an absconder in what was known as the Munshigunge Wire-cutting case. Deputed from Calcutta, he came silently like a thief in the night, alighting under cover of darkness at Kurmitola station where a faithful comrade was waiting for him with a bicycle. There were two projects ready for execution—one at Dacca and the other at nearby Narayangunge. The Dacca project had emanated from Suresh Majumdar (father of Ujjala Majumdar), a leading member of the party, who had definite information that on a certain day at 11 a.m. a durwan would leave the Municipal Office to deposit a considerable sum of money in the Dacca Branch of what was then known as the Imperial Bank of India. It was decided that the bag of money must be snatched right at the gate of the Municipal Office for the simple reason that the gate was relatively unguarded. There would be three cyclists with two riders on each; the cyclist in the middle would carry the haul, those in front and at the rear mounting guard. The second rider on all the three cycles would be fully equipped with firearms.

It was a hazardous affair, for Lakshmibazar where the Municipal Office was situated would be a crowded area at 11 o'clock. But the leader, Biren Ghose, had taken every precaution. As soon as the durwan was to come out of the gate, he would be laid low by a blow with an iron rod. As he would fall prostrate, the bag would be snatched from him and the cyclists would lose no time in speeding away through Lakshmibazar, to turn left into the narrow lane that would take them to the Narinda Bridge. From there they would proceed to Wari and then to their ultimate destination—both secret and safe. Biren Ghose had already reconnoitred the route and felt that there would be no hitch if only the crowd near the Municipal Office could be safely negotiated. And it all happened exactly as planned. After the durwan had been struck down and relieved of his bag and the cyclists were astride their cycles—all finished in a

minute or so—the crowd of passers-by, recovering from the sudden shock, raised a hue and cry; but when Biren Ghose fired a few shots into the air, they went their own ways, leaving the robbers alone.

If Shakespeare's Polonius had been present at Dacca, he would have called the fourth robbery a comical-historical-epical affair. Here the victim himself was in league with the robbers. Surya Saha, a prosperous merchant of Narayangunge, the principal trading centre of East Bengal dominated by European business houses, was a member of the B.V. For reasons best known to himself Surya, who wanted to make a large donation to party funds, requested his B.V. brethren to seize it by force. Possibly he thought that that would save him the trouble of accounting for it to his partners and the tax authorities, or as a calculating businessman he might have wanted to share the loss with others—auctioneers, creditors, partners and tax-gatherers. One night he secretly brought a few of his revolutionary friends to the iron safe where cash was kept, showed them where the keys were to be found and gave them other necessary clues so that they might accomplish their task swiftly and safely. The adventure was thus a cake-walk affair but the question was how to transport the money to Dacca. The return journey would be an arduous affair. The inmates of the *Gadi*, part office, part godown, and part residence, would most certainly raise an alarm. In spite of its commercial importance, Narayangunge was a small town where it would be hazardous to seek shelter in a private residential house. And there was only one road from Narayangunge to Dacca, the rail road, which was not safe, because there was a well-equipped police station on the way at Fatulla, which would get telephonic information in advance and the looters were bound to be arrested. However, a devious but safe way was discovered. Parallel to the highway ran the river Buriganga where, a mile before Fatulla, a big country boat would wait for the cyclists and their plunder. The plan succeeded. The police station at Fatulla did indeed get the information and a police party was sent out too. But by the time the policemen started searching the area, the robbers had reached Dacca safe with their haul. In this robbery, which was also a novel method of collecting a donation, the leading part was once again taken by Biren Ghose. The money that was

collected in these four operations was handed over to Supati Roy and Nikunja Sen, who, as I have already said, were on the Action Squad which had started work early in 1930. The Squad moved so unobtrusively that the police—and many other people—laid these robberies at the door of the Anushilan Samiti, which was the most prominent of the revolutionary organizations then active in eastern Bengal.

In the affair of Surya Saha, we find robbery merging into donation, which has been another source of revenue for all secret societies in all countries. Most of these donors choose to remain unknown. These secret donations are so striking that they have to be brought to light so that posterity may know how patriotic battles are fought and won. I would especially mention the pathetic-heroic story of Santosh Paul, a young member of the party, whose father, a very prosperous man, carried on a banking business. In the course of his transactions he became the master of valuable jewellery which his debtors had failed to redeem. The parents knew the ways of their son who, counting on the tacit consent of the family, one night got hold of the keys of the iron chest in which ornaments were kept, and removed articles he could easily carry off to his partymen. But as he was taking out these ornaments, one of his fingers was caught in a cleft and part of it was sliced off. Pressing his bleeding finger with the other hand and with the bundle of rifled ornaments in his pockets, he managed to rush out of his house and deposit them with his leaders. Two days after, when his father opened the iron chest, he was repelled by the foul smell of putrid flesh and soon realized that he had been relieved of jewellery and his son of a part of his finger. Three other workers—Bodhisattwa Bose, Kalachand Saha and Gopal Nandy—also collected handsome donations, and in course of a few months the party was in possession of about eighty thousand rupees, which the Action Squad could spend for supplying the workers with adequate fire-power, for maintaining communications, for reconnaissance as also for other work that lay ahead.

#### IV

Once the Action Squad was equipped with money, they faced the problem of finding firearms and also of training

selected boys in their use. In free India, securing revolvers and pistols, pipe guns and hand-grenades has become a relatively easy affair like all other illegal transactions, and there are even many small factories manufacturing bombs, pipe guns, hand-grenades and other weapons. But it was a terribly difficult thing in those days to procure firearms, for in British India police surveillance was much more rigorous than now and smuggled weaponry was almost beyond the reach even of people who cared neither for money nor for punishment. Bombs were indeed manufactured here and there, but they either burst too soon or too late, and so many people are involved in making a bomb that detection is relatively easy. For these reasons Hemchandra Ghose wanted his boys to go in for revolvers or pistols rather than for making bombs. Almost the only source of securing these weapons was the merchant navy which was infested with smugglers. It was a costly and somewhat risky business because the police knew of this trafficking in arms. But here, as before, Haridas Datta, who with Rasamoy Sur was in charge of procuring arms, showed his customary pluck and had also his proverbial luck. Far back in 1913, he had, after the O'Brien affair, boarded a merchant vessel and gone abroad; in course of his voyage he had seen many sailors running a regular business in the unlawful sale of arms. It was not difficult for him to contact such sailors although more than a decade had passed. It was partly by chance that he soon met a smuggler-sailor, one Mr Mill, who was an Irishman for whom any work that was likely to harm British authorities was an end in itself. It is said that there may be a soul of good in things evil, and although smugglers and blackmarketeers are looked upon as the scum of society, we may discover sparks of nobility even amongst them. The gun-running Mill, when he knew why Haridas Datta wanted firearms, became half a convert to the cause, for his Irish blood boiled against British colonialism, and he would regularly supply this customer with revolvers and pistols, and at not very exorbitant prices. Indeed, on occasions he would himself seek out Haridas when he had firearms for sale and would look for other customers only if Haridas did not want his wares.

The duty of training the young cadets in the use of revolvers and pistols devolved on Major Satya Gupta and Major Jyotish



Joardar, who had themselves learnt the craft as members of the U.T.C. Besides, being a student of science, Jyotish also understood the technical aspects of these lethal instruments, and he could explain and demonstrate how a gunman using small arms should first of all stand at right angles to his victims and then keep his elbow fixed to his side and his forearm aimed at the target; how, when he had to shift his position, he should move his entire body without moving his wrist or fingers. The cadets, after they had been given preliminary training inside a house, would be taken to the southern side of the Dhakuria Lakes after nightfall when they would learn how to fire and the sound of shots would be drowned in the whirring noise of passing trains. Occasionally, if they could get a large vacant house, they might do a little practice in hitting a target even by daytime. Such lessons cannot be said to be adequate and satisfactory. Yet just as, thanks to the Irishman Mill, the party had always the necessary quantum of arms, so also on account of their dedication and determination the cadets seldom failed to hit the target. It is the spirit that mattered, said Hemchandra Ghose, and his confidence was infectious.

We fail!

But screw your courage to the sticking-place,  
And we'll not fail.

That is the idea which inspired these young men.

## V

On 12 March 1930 Mahatmaji started on his peaceful march to Dandi. About a month later, on 18 April, the anniversary of the Easter Rising in Ireland, Surya Sen launched his sanguinary campaign at Chittagong. There were outrages at Sholapore in Bombay and also in Punjab. In Bengal, on 25 August, there was an abortive attempt on Sir Charles Tegart, the Police Commissioner of Calcutta, near what was then called Dalhousie Square. The Action Squad of the B.V. too was ready for an assault, but they felt that as most of their trainees were from Dacca and knew by heart its roads and lanes and bye-lanes, that would be the ideal place for the commencement of their opera-

tions. They had also fixed on the man who would undertake it —Binoy Bose, a fourth-year student of the Medical School and an excellent tennis player, who had a strong body and cool nerves and was, above all, a crack shot. Binoy's family originally hailed from Rauthbhog, a village in the district of Dacca, but was at that time living in Calcutta. In mid-August, Binoy himself was in Calcutta on a short visit to his people.

Suddenly the Action Squad received information that the Acting Governor of Bengal, Sir Hugh Stephenson, would go to Dacca to preside over the Convocation of Dacca University. So the moment had arrived. Binoy was asked to proceed to Dacca immediately and take further instructions from Supati Roy who would be meeting him there. In Calcutta he should report himself at the junction of Amherst Street and Bowbazar, and at the appointed hour a known friend would hand him a third class ticket for Dacca. He did as he was directed, got his ticket, and curiously enough, hunter and quarry alighted on the platform of Dacca station at the same hour from the same train. Supati Roy did meet him, but after a detailed examination of the security arrangements in the city the senior members of the party felt that the Governor was to be so elaborately guarded that it would not be possible to get His Excellency within shooting range. So they decided that instead of the Governor, Binoy should try his hand on the Inspector-General of Police Mr Lowman, and the new orders were communicated through Supati Roy. On 29 August 1930 at about 7 a.m. Binoy came to the hospital for duty and was surprised to see the area surrounded by a posse of constables. On learning that all these arrangements were meant for Inspector-General Lowman who would come to visit the hospital at 9 a.m. to see one Mr Bird who was lying seriously ill there, Binoy felt that he could not miss this golden opportunity. He came back and collected his .320 bore revolver from Animesh Roy of Armanitola, and at the appropriate time sauntered into the hospital nonchalantly as if for a tennis match. Students and staff, who knew Binoy very well as a senior student and also as a competent tennis player, did not take any special notice of him. Binoy proceeded slowly towards the verandah where from a considerable distance he found Lowman and Superintendent of Police Hodson talking to Civil Surgeon Bromfield, with the government contractor

Satyen Sen standing by. He felt that if he approached closer to the party, he might attract the notice of any one of the four people in the verandah. So, although he was then quite a long way off from his intended victims, he fired five shots, hitting Lowman with two of them and Hodson with the other three. Lowman's wounds proved fatal, but Hodson recovered after an operation, though he remained an invalid for the rest of his life.

Binoy realized that although none of his shots had misfired, his revolver had no more cartridges, and he had no time to reload it. So he took to his heels, and his flight from Dacca, when the entire government machinery was set in motion against him, was a little odyssey which deserves to be narrated in detail. He had one great liability which revolutionaries in general do not have. They never allow themselves to be photographed, and the first thing that the police used to do when they apprehended any suspect was to take his photograph. As a tennis player Binoy had once been photographed, and he knew that copies of this photo would soon be bandied from place to place. So he must escape into safe custody before this process was completed. His first encounter was with Satyen Sen, the government contractor, who followed close on his heels and grasped him from behind. Binoy suddenly sat down and dealt such a terrific blow to Sen's face that he reeled back in a half-dazed condition. Then Binoy began to run along the passage between the Medical School and the attached hospital, pursued by some coolies and durwans who soon gave up the chase out of fear. He was now on the lawn of his school, but leaping over the compound wall adjoining the Dissection Room, he found himself on a public highway with a Medical mess in front of him. Getting inside, he managed to jump over the roof of its latrine. He was now before an open house which he entered by one door and left by another. This brought him to the Armanitola Church and the nearby lawn. In the course of his skirmish with Satyen Sen he had dropped the revolver, which he did not regret. Looking like an ordinary passer-by, he hired a hackney carriage, alighted at Buxibazar near the house of Mani Sen, his friend and a co-worker of the party, who took him to a second house of theirs close by. Here he would have to stay during the day, and at nightfall Mani would deliver him to the custody of Supati Roy who was in overall charge of the operation.

Supati had made arrangements for Binoy's shelter at the house of Sasanka Datta at Sangat-tola where he went accompanied by another boy of the same name, whom we would call Binoy (Jr). Next day (30 August) Binoy must be safely moved out of Dacca which was being intensively searched by policemen and their informers from one end to another. On that day, at some time or other, Binoy (Jr) must escort the absconder to Gandaria. Luckily for them, by noon the sky was overcast with dark clouds and it soon began to rain heavily. It was also their good fortune that it was the Governor's Day at the Dacca race-course where His Excellency would be present in person, and almost the entire police force had been moved there to protect the Governor. Binoy (Jr) went out alone, surveyed the area and found everything in order. Feeling reasonably secure, Binoy (Jr) and Binoy (Sr) came out on the open road, with umbrellas over their heads which partly concealed their faces. They avoided the usual route, proceeded in a roundabout way alongside the rail track and safely reached Gandaria, where Binoy was accommodated in a house in Rajani Chaudhuri's garden. Here he was to be looked after by Nepal Nag and Bakul Dasgupta. As soon as he reached this house, he found a good meal ready for him, sent by Nepal's mother Kusumkumari Debi whom all the revolutionaries of this group regarded as their mother and who delighted in cooking food with her own hands for these devoted sons of the Motherland.

The train for Narayangunge, which was only a few miles away, was due to leave Dacca at 6.30 p.m. The life of a revolutionary is a strange mixture of desperate daring and meticulous caution. He may not set his own life at a pin's fee, but he has to proceed with utmost circumspection, for a single false step might endanger the party and the cause. Binoy with his posse of escorts—Bangeshwar Roy, Bakul Dasgupta and Binoy Bose (Jr)—would entrain at Dolaiganj, a small station just ahead of Dacca, and they would alight at Chasara, another midway station, where Supati Roy would take charge of Binoy and the escorts would return to Dacca. It all happened as planned, and Supati and Binoy along with Girija Sen, a student of Dacca University, travelled by a hackney carriage to a house owned by Girija's family.

Leaving Binoy to pass the night of 30 August in Girija Sen's

house at Narayangunge, we may now take a look at Dacca where the police had obtained Binoy's name from a medical student who knew Binoy and had witnessed the shooting from a distance. With the help of some local roughs, they rummaged Binoy's mess, beat and tortured whomsoever they found there. More importantly, they came upon a group photograph of tennis players in which Binoy figured prominently because the occasion was his winning a trophy. Arrangements were at once made for prominently displaying copies of Binoy's photo at all important stations in Bengal and outside Bengal, in markets and other public places. All avenues leading away from Dacca were also strictly guarded, and now that the police knew Binoy's antecedents, all likely places where he might have taken shelter inside the city were carefully watched.

But Government agencies, swift-footed as they were, did not know that the bird they were looking for had flown out of Dacca, never to return. From Narayangunge to Calcutta, it was a longish journey but a straightforward affair. One had merely to take one's place in the steamer moored to the jetty and to get into a compartment of a waiting train at the other end at Goalundo, reaching Sealdah at dawn on the following day. But Supati, who knew that both steamer and train would be infested with spies and also of the possibility of a stray acquaintance of Binoy hailing him by name, devised a tortuous journey to Calcutta via Sirajgunge and Kishoregunge, running through several districts and providing many paths of escape. He hoped Binoy would be able to complete the journey before the policemen of these districts—Mymensing, Pabna, Tripura—had been alerted and all the loopholes had been plugged. On the morning of 31 August, Girija Sen took Binoy to the other side—Bandar—of the river Sital-Lakshya, which was more an inlet than a river. Soon after, Supati Roy arrived there with Amiya, Girija's younger brother. Supati and Binoy got into a country boat which would take them to Baidyerbazar seven or eight miles away where they would cross over to the other bank. As Supati did not want the boatman to know too much, he disembarked when they had about two miles to go and took another country boat in which they covered less than half the distance left when a strong gale accompanied by rain made further progress impossible. The boatman suggested that there

was a small steamer station where he could moor his boat, and they might go where they liked—even up to Bhairab on the opposite bank. This would suit them; only they wanted to avoid both a steamer containing many passengers and also a large station like Bhairab. But the inclement weather left no alternative. So they had to get down and board the steamer when it touched this small station. Supati Roy was relieved to find that there was no sign of any police activity in the steamer and no curious eyes peered at them. But when the steamer approached Bhairab, which, like Narayangunge had both a steamer station and a rail station, they could see even from a distance policemen moving about briskly. Supati was somewhat alarmed. However, trusting to their nimble legs and unruffled nerves, they quickly came out of the station without being spotted by the police. As they could not get their tickets for Calcutta at the railway counter at Bhairab, they walked for eight miles and then entrained at a small station. The train took them to Kishoregunge from where they went to Jagannathgunge and then by a steamer to Sirajgunge. Luckily, this side of north Bengal had not yet been alerted to the possibility of a visit by absconders from Dacca, and Supati and Binoy had a quiet time.

It was near daybreak when the two revolutionaries reached Calcutta by train via Sirajgunge, but avoiding Sealdah, they got down at the relatively secluded north suburban station of Dum-dum. Here also they avoided the main gate, and walking a few yards along the rail track, easily crossed over to the public thoroughfare. It was not difficult for Supati Roy and Binoy to reach their secret hide-out at 7 Waliullah Lane in central Calcutta. It was a house rented by the veteran B.V. leader Suresh Majumdar who ran a brisk business in rickshaws. This house accommodated his office and rickshaw-garage, and it was also his residence. Situated just to the east of Wellesley Tank, surrounded by bustees inhabited by poorer Muslims and infested by sauntering riff-raff, it was an ideal temporary shelter for political absconders. As Supati Roy and Binoy entered the Waliullah Lane house quite early in the morning, they were greeted by Haridas Datta, Sureshchandra Majumdar (father of Ujjala who has been and will again be referred to), Rasamoy Sur and Nikunja Sen, who had all been waiting in tense sus-

pense. After hearing the whole account, they congratulated Binoy on his marksmanship and alacrity and thanked Supati Roy for his superb handling of the situation, especially for the choice of the route which combined safety with swiftness.

The Action Squad felt that it would be very risky to keep Binoy in Calcutta for long. 'Mejda' Haridas Datta undertook to arrange for his safe custody and also for shifting him from his present habitat. Within a few days he took Binoy in a car to Hooghly where Saroj Roy, husband of his niece, was confidential clerk to the District Magistrate. This gentleman, although not a member of the party, was a sympathizer who would be glad to do a good turn, and he could be depended upon to be tight-lipped in his own interest. Using the Magistrate's car, Saroj brought his two guests to Bandel Junction where they took train for Dhanbad at 11 p.m. From Dhanbad it was an easy and safe journey to Katrasgarh, also in Bihar, where Haridas Datta's friend Anathbandhu Das held a comfortable job in a colliery. Here in Anathbandhu's house they would stay until they had a fresh signal from Calcutta.

Haridas Datta and Binoy passed a few days in remote Katrasgarh in quiet security, but soon the veteran leader of the B.V. sensed a change in the atmosphere of the place. He saw unknown faces and strangers questioning local people in muted whispers. Anathbabu tried to laugh such fears away, but Haridas, who trusted his trained eyes more than his friend's complacency, was not prepared to take any risk. So forthwith he left for Calcutta with Binoy who was once again deposited at 7 Waliullah Lane. Binoy stayed here for two days before being transferred to a rented house at Beliaghata where Satya Ghosh, a relation of Suresh Majumdar and a B.V. sympathizer, received him cordially. Here Binoy stayed for quite some time, but once again Rasamoy Sur, who alone was asked to keep contact with him, sniffed danger one day and decided that Binoy must not be kept in the Beliaghata house any longer. So that very evening he was shifted to Metiabruz in the house of Rajen Guha who deserves to be commemorated on his own account.

Rajen Guha was one of Hemchandra Ghose's earliest recruits to Mukti Sangha. In 1905 he had taken a vow at Dacca that he would work for the party until the country had thrown

off its foreign yoke. Hailing from Chandpur in Tripura district, he was working at that time as a mechanic in the Railway workshop at Dacca. When during the First World War there were extensive arrests all over Bengal, he absconded under the leader's direction and was very soon in Burma from where he returned home after about two years. The first thing he discovered was that the police had completely forgotten him, and so he could safely take up a job with the well-known British shipping company of those days, I.G.N.R., as one of their overseers in their Calcutta workshop at Metiabruz. He soon became very popular as an expert mechanic who worked far into the night, and was thus able to repair without fear of detection the revolvers and pistols which Haridas Datta bought from smugglers and brought to him for mending. In this way, unknown to others, he rendered signal service to the party. When Binoy was kept in his house, the Action Squad felt a sense of relief, for nobody would, at least for a time, suspect that such a place was being utilized for such a purpose.

All this while Binoy himself was happy and gay and full of enthusiasm for the party and the cause. But the elders felt that Binoy's life should be saved and for that purpose the best thing would be to send him out of the country. Subhaschandra himself approved of the idea, and his elder brother Saratchandra offered to pay the passage money. There were other generous people ready to finance the venture. Lady Abala Bose, as is now well known, was sympathetic to extremist politics and befriended Sister Nivedita when she had to leave the Ramakrishna Math on account of what may be called her revolutionary idealism. Lady Bose also came forward to make a handsome donation, and so did a venerable Indian scientist (P. C. Ray?) who was equally famous for his contributions to science and swadeshi. All arrangements were soon completed. As an absconder, Haridas Datta had gone abroad on a forged passport under an assumed name, and as even now he was in constant touch with arms smugglers travelling in merchant vessels, he knew the tricks of the trade very well indeed. Through an Anglo-Indian official of a sea-going vessel, a berth was made available for Binoy who would board it at Kidderpore and disembark at an Italian port. The date of the voyage was



fixed, and it was settled that Haridas Datta would be at the dock at five in the morning on the appointed day. But Binoy, who heard all these discussions and *pourparlers*, seemed to be lukewarm, unenthusiastic and even dispirited. WHY?

## Binoy—Badal—Dinesh

When the elders felt that Binoy was somewhat unresponsive to their plan, Rasamoy Sur was asked to ascertain what was in his mind, for they did not want to do anything that was repugnant to his own inclinations. Binoy's answer was unambiguous. He would scrupulously follow the directions given by the leadership, but since Rasamoy Sur wanted to know what he felt about it, he could only say that he had vowed to serve the party and the country and had never thought of his own safety. So this proposal of an escape from the cause and the country did not appeal to him at all. This was decisive. The plan, so ingeniously devised and carefully nursed, was at once abandoned. I have on purpose given a longish account, derived from the Action Squad, of Binoy's itinerary of about a hundred days from the Mitford Hospital at Dacca to his conversation with Rasamoy Sur at Metiabruz, because amateur politicians and philosophers should know the hazards these 'terrorists' or 'Fascists' ran, the temptations they resisted and the sacrifices they cheerfully made.

Binoy's answer to Rasamoy Sur was a refreshing surprise even for the hard-core Action Squad, who soon thought out an 'operation' that would not only be an appropriate end to such a heroic career but would also make a notable contribution to the cause of revolution. An assault must be made on Writers' Buildings, which, besides being the nerve centre of British administration in Bengal, was situated within hailing distance of the police headquarters at Lall Bazar and not far from Fort William. The plan, proposed, discussed and quickly accepted, would be spectacular in execution, and it would also have a paralysing effect on the administration. In fact, after this raid the British officials lived in constant fear and realized that the

white man's burden was indeed a dead weight. There was, besides, a novel side to the proposed action. The raid was to be made on Writers' Buildings by a suicide squad that would storm the citadel of power and then embrace martyrdom by swallowing potassium cyanide. Such premeditated self-immolation would have an inspiring effect on revolutionaries all over the country. When Binoy heard of the plan from Rasamoy Sur, his face beamed with enthusiasm.

Some such plan must have occurred to the Action Squad much earlier, even before the Lowman affair, which was a sudden development, for as far back as July 1930, two picked boys of the party—Dinesh Gupta and Badal Gupta—had been brought to Calcutta and were being trained for the coming fray. Dinesh was a brilliant young man, brimming over with courage and enthusiasm, of whom more will be said later on. Here I shall narrate a small episode that will reveal the stuff he was made of—and yet it was 'a piece of him'. On 26 January 1930, as a part of the celebration of the first Independence Day at Dacca, there was brisk picketing before shops selling liquors and foreign textiles, and the police, as was not unusual, were making merciless *lathi* charges on the picketers. Superintendent E. Hodson happened to be sitting in a car near Ray & Co, the city's largest stores for quality wines, where both picketing and police action were at the peak. Dinesh, himself no advocate of non-violent picketing, was going along that route on a cycle. Seeing Hodson's car, he got down from his cycle and, confronting Hodson, said, 'It's none of your business to beat people. Arrest them if you like.' Hodson whipped out his loaded revolver and threatened to shoot down the audacious young man unless he moved off. Leaving his cycle in charge of a passer-by, Dinesh came nearer and holding his hands up, roared back, 'Shoot me if you are as good as your word.' Flabbergasted, Hodson neither moved nor spoke a word. 'You are not as good as your word,' Dinesh concluded. 'That shows you are a coward.' And there the confrontation ended.

Badal alias Sudhir Gupta was different. I knew his family, for we hailed from the same village, or from two parts of the same village (Banari-Bidgaon). I still remember that I used to pass by the house of the Guptas whenever I went to the market more than sixty years ago. I was admitted to Banari High School in

1912, the year in which Badal was born. After their house was washed away by the erosion of the Padma in the early twenties, the Guptas moved to Simulia, a few miles to the east. But some of them stayed on at Banari in a house adjoining mine. Amongst them was Abanikanta Gupta with his son Badal who came to join Banari High School, but Abanikanta's wife Abalasundari and her other children resided permanently at Simulia. I visited Banari last in September/October 1929, a year before Badal's martyrdom, but have no clear recollection of this young man. I have heard that he was quiet, soft-spoken, but determined, disciplined and very cool-headed. These were the qualities for which the Action Squad, in my view, selected him, for he would be a foil to the more ebullient Dinesh, and Binoy would be the right leader for the joint venture.

Ever since their arrival in Calcutta in July 1930, Dinesh and Badal had been living in Park Circus which in those days was very different from the Park Circus of today. Not far from the Post Office, there was a dispensary with a cluster of *bustees* around. The dispensary was run by three doctors—Dr Narayan Chakraborti, Dr Himanshu Banerji and Dr Animesh Roy. The two last-named doctors, both ex-students of Dacca Medical School and both trusted members of B.V. as yet unnoticed by the police, occupied the first floor of the dispensary which now became a secret centre of the Action Squad. There were three rooms on this floor, one of which was occupied by the two doctors and the other two by Supati Roy and Nikunja Sen. Rasamoy Sur, as we have seen, shuttled from one place to another, and that is why, to escape attention, he would visit this secret hide-out only occasionally. Readers may remember Animesh Roy from whom Binoy collected the revolver with which he shot Lowman and Hodson. On that occasion Animesh had accompanied Supati Roy when the latter went to Dacca to plan and supervise the action, and then he quietly returned to Calcutta.

The date for the assault on Writers' Buildings had been fixed for 8 December 1930. For security reasons Binoy could not venture into the open street by day. So it was decided that the preliminaries would be settled by Supati Roy and Nikunja Sen, and they would give necessary instructions and directions to Dinesh and Badal, who were given the names of Captain Gupta

and Lt Gupta. After Supati and Nikunja had done their part of the work, Rasamoy Sur would produce Binoy, or 'Major' Binoy Bose at the appropriate hour, and the three would proceed to Writers' Buildings. Praphulla Datta, another member of the Action Squad, had already given a sketch plan of Writers' Buildings to Supati Roy and Nikunja Sen, and a copy of it to Rasamoy Sur for the edification of Binoy. It was arranged that Nikunja Sen would take Dinesh and Badal to Writers' Buildings on two different days to study the lay-out of the place. On 8 December at 12 noon they were to enter the room of the Inspector-General of Prisons, Mr Simpson, shoot him dead, come out and fire on other Europeans. When the panic-stricken European officials had sought shelter or been laid low, they were to enter a vacant room to swallow potassium cyanide, to be carried by each of them in a small ampoule in his pocket.

On the first day Nikunja went to Writers' Buildings at 11 a.m. with Dinesh and Badal, and moving along the corridor, minutely studied the topography of the place. Returning home, Dinesh made the characteristic comment that he had no brains for plans, lay-out, etc. and a poor memory that could not retain all that his eyes saw. So on the next occasion Nikunjada should take Badal alone and see and study whatever was worth seeing or studying, but at the right moment a trigger-happy marksman like him would not fail. It might be pointed out that Dinesh was an ex-U.T.C. man, and not Binoy, as was hastily inferred by most people at that time. He, however, did accompany Nikunja Sen on the second visit too, and listened carefully to the instructions given by the two senior members of the party.

Rasamoy Sur had, in the meantime, made Binoy examine the sketch prepared by Praphulla Datta and given him other small directions. On 8 December Nikunja Sen would come to the Pipe Road junction in Kidderpore with Dinesh and Badal at 11.45 a.m. and meet Rasamoy Sur and Binoy who would arrive there at the same time from Rajen Guha's Metiabruz house where Binoy had been sheltering. From the Pipe Road junction the three soldiers of freedom would go in a taxi to Dalhousie Square, which was destined to be re-named after them. European clothes had been made for the three young men, who would enter Writers' Buildings, each carrying a file in his hand so that people moving about on staircases or in the corridors

might think that they had come on some official business, and the bearers sitting in front of the officials' rooms would not think of offering any obstruction. At about 12 noon Badal would hand over a visiting card with a false name to Mr Simpson's *chaprasi* (office messenger). After they had shot Mr Simpson, they would shout 'Bande Mataram' all at a time, and Jiten Sen, a trusted member of the party, waiting on a bench on the northern side of the Dalhousie Square Tank, would convey the information to appropriate quarters.

For two days preceding the action Supati Roy and Nikunja Sen kept a constant watch around the house in which they were staying with Dinesh and Badal. In the first week of December, they had been going in and coming out at odd hours—sometimes in too great a hurry to notice if they were being shadowed. At last the night of 7 December came. It was a very long night indeed for Supati and Nikunja who almost counted the minutes. At 11 p.m. Supati felt that something unusual was happening nearby. They went out, one after the other, and found that there was, indeed, some unusual movement, but it was only some plain clothes policemen who were waiting to nab a notorious ruffian who might pass by. But their tension hardly abated. When midnight struck, neither Supati nor Nikunja had been able to get a wink of sleep. In the adjoining room Supati found Dinesh and Badal sleeping like logs, absolutely unconcerned that this was in all probability their last night on earth. Soon after, they were startled by a gentle knock at the door but it was, again, only Animesh and Himanshu from the other room, who, having noticed something unusual on the northern side, had come to give a warning to their comrades, who assured them that there was nothing to worry about. As it was nearing dawn, Supati and Nikunja now tried to snatch a few minutes of sleep but could not. Once again, except for the sound of heavy breathing, all was quiet in the other room where Dinesh and Badal were sunk in deep sleep, and there was not a mouse stirring.

## II

At daybreak on 8 December, Supati Roy went out to give instructions to Jiten Sen who was to post himself at the northern

end of Dalhousie Square. Nikunja was to take charge of the two prospective martyrs and the necessary paraphernalia—visiting cards, file covers, scraps of paper and shreds of cloth, three match-boxes, some money, three ampoules of potassium cyanide—and, last and first, three revolvers which must be examined and tested afresh. After Supati's departure, Nikunja made necessary preparations and then left in a taxi with Dinesh and Badal, reaching Pipe Road junction at the appointed hour, and soon Rasamoy Sur arrived with Binoy. As a taxi was found quickly, Binoy and his two companions jumped into it, Binoy shouting to the driver 'Dalhousie Square'. Rasamoy Sur and Nikunja Sen proceeded to the Alipore Zoo where they found Supati waiting for them.

Binoy, Badal and Dinesh reached Writers' Buildings almost exactly at 12 noon and went upstairs, each with a file in his hand. They proceeded straight to the office room of Mr Simpson, I.G. of Prisons, and Badal handed his visiting card to the *chaprasi* who was sitting in front of the door. As the *chaprasi* went inside with the card, the three visitors followed him and found the I.G. poring over his papers with a clerk standing by to assist him. Immediately on entering, the three friends stationed themselves in military style, each in his proper place, and Binoy shouted 'Hands up!' 'Fire!' Before any one of the three men—Mr Simpson, the clerk Jnan Guha and the *chaprasi*—could have any idea of what was happening, six bullets flew out of the revolvers and the Colonel's lifeless body fell on the floor. Jnan Guha, who was unhurt, had hidden under a table. As panic prevailed all around, the raiders came out shouting 'Bande Mataram'—the signal for Jiten Sen—and found European officials fleeing for their lives. Binoy, Dinesh and Badal started firing upon them, injuring some of them, notably Secretary Nelson and another luminary of the Civil Service, Henry Twynam, who was later to become Governor of Central Provinces. Mr Johnson, an American clergyman, who happened to be at the Secretariat, managed to escape by climbing down a pipe. But by this time the police had arrived on the scene—Inspector-General Craig, Police Commissioner Tegart and his Deputy Gordon with a posse of armed constables. Determined to hold out as long as possible, Binoy and his two comrades went inside the Passport Office which was empty, to

reload their revolvers, and from there they continued the fight, somewhat in the manner of trench warfare. Lying down, they repulsed the attack that was now launched upon them. When Binoy found that their ammunition was all but exhausted, he thought of his last weapon—the ampoules. He ordered Badal to sit on a chair and swallow the poison he was carrying. Badal obeyed and died instantaneously. Binoy and Dinesh sucked their ampoules too, but in order to make death doubly sure, they also shot themselves in the head with the bullets still left. This, however, only prevented the liquid from coursing down to the stomach and acting quickly. When hearing no more sound armed policemen entered the room and arrested the three raiders, they found that one of them was dead while the pulse was still beating feebly in the other two.

Badal's dead body was handed over to the police, and Binoy and Dinesh were removed to a hospital where Binoy never regained full consciousness. But it is said that once when he realized that he was being treated by doctors, he tore off his bandage and stuck his finger-nails into the open wound in order to produce sepsis which would hasten the end. It came in the early hours of 13 December. On the 12th afternoon his parents Rebatimohan Bose and Nandarani Debi were allowed to visit him for a short while. They found him unconscious, and after a brief glimpse of their dying son, wrenched themselves away. But just when they were leaving, Binoy, who had then lost the power of speech, raised his hand to his forehead to salute them.

The police and the Government were dumbfounded by this young man's activities. Who gave him arms? Where did he learn his unfailing marksmanship? How did he manage to cross over to Calcutta, and where and how did he spend his 'hundred days' from 29 August to 8 December? And above all, to which revolutionary group did he belong? To all these questions Binoy would be tight-lipped. When he was semi-conscious and in delirium, he would only answer, 'Left, Right, Left, Forward!' At one stage the police even brought an English clergyman who might with his gentle religious discourses bring him round to speak out. The secrets sought to be brought out by the Government were certainly valuable, and valuable also must have been the reverend clergyman's religious consolations, but more valu-



able is the spirit of the young man who politely declined the temptation of a safe voyage to Italy and all the prospects accompanying it and then embraced death so that his country might attain the freedom which he himself would not live to see.

Badal was equally an enigma, but his case did not worry the police long. The visiting card he had handed over to Mr Simpson's *chaprasi* bore the name of B. N. De, but in about two days' time the police came to know that he was really Badal Gupta, son of Abanikanta Gupta, whose younger brother Taranikanta Gupta was, if I remember aright, proprietor of Bhowanipore Engineering and Trading Company. Taranibabu could identify his nephew, but as he had no idea of the latter's activities and associations, he was of no further use to the police, who soon disposed of the dead body and turned their attention to Dinesh Gupta who was limping back to recovery.

### III

Dinesh had been hit by two bullets—one self-inflicted, lodged in his brain and the other fired by a policeman, and lodged inside his chest. As both the bullets were extracted by surgeons, he regained the power of speech, made satisfactory progress and after three weeks was well enough to be sent from the hospital to Alipore Central Jail. In the hospital he was very cordially treated by doctors and nurses, who, I believe, were full of admiration for his self-immolating patriotism. But I have heard too that they were instructed by higher authorities to try to win over this young idealist by courtesy and kindness so that the ground might be prepared for the Intelligence agencies of the Government, who would take him up later. Whatever might be at the back of their minds, the hospital people were very affable, but the Intelligence people could make no headway.

Early in 1931 Alipore Central Jail was full of political prisoners. Mahatma Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement was in full swing, and Government had put into prison agitators of all shades—violent and non-violent. Subhaschandra Bose was, of course, there, and so were Harikumar Chakraborti, Purna Das, Bipinbihari Ganguly—and Hemchandra Ghose. There was a touch of dramatic irony in the presence of Hem

Ghose and Dinesh Gupta in the same campus. Police were conducting intensive enquiries throughout the entire province to unearth the antecedents of Binoy, Badal and Dinesh. But they had not yet laid their hands on Supati Roy, Rasamoy Sur, Nikunja Sen and Haridas Datta, for they had no idea whatsoever of the party and the organization to which the three martyrs belonged. Strangely enough, now the supreme leader (Barda) and one of his most valiant lieutenants were in the same building, though few people, possibly none except Subhaschandra, knew of the connexion, and thanks to him the two did get an opportunity of greeting each other.

The political prisoners, who had been lodged in Alipore Central Jail—Yard One and Yard Two—were mostly detained without trial and were therefore entitled to many privileges—the freedom to worship, for example. They told Subhaschandra that they would like to celebrate the Saraswati Puja. When he put it to Mr Swan, the jailer, who was an Irishman and greatly admired Subhas, he readily agreed. On the morning of the Puja day Subhaschandra proposed that the three prisoners in the Condemned Cell—Ramakrishna Biswas and Kalipada Chakraborti who were awaiting trial for the murder of Tarini Mukherji whom they had mistaken for Inspector-General G. Craig, and Dineshchandra Gupta—be allowed to participate in the religious festival. Swan was taken aback, for it was against the Jail Code to allow prisoners in the Condemned Cell to come out, far less to mix with other prisoners many of whom were under detention only for a short period. Mr Swan knew that if he yielded, there was every possibility of dismissal from service and that he might even have to face trial in a court. Yet this Irishman, who in Belfast had seen the activities of Irish rebels, faced the risk and allowed Dinesh, Ramakrishna and Kalipada to participate in the festivities along with other prisoners, but only for a few hours. They all came and went back, full of high spirits. Dinesh greeted all his old friends, particularly Sunil Sen Gupta, then editor of *Benu*, to whom he confided that there was no possibility of the police getting a word out of him. Saluting the elders, particularly Subhaschandra and 'Barda' Hemchandra Ghose, and touching their feet, he went back happily to his cell to await the trial and its predictable aftermath. A special Tribunal presided over by

Judge R. R. Garlick tried him and awarded capital punishment in March 1931. The sentence was carried out about four months later on 7 July. Subhaschandra was at Arambagh when the execution took place. He was deeply moved as Dr Radhakrishna Pal read out to him Dinesh's letters to his mother, written from the Condemned Cell.

Just twenty days after Dinesh's execution, on 27 August, Garlick was shot dead in Alipore Court by an unknown assailant who was himself struck down by a sentry. In his pocket was found a chit of paper in which he said that he was avenging the death of Dinesh Gupta and described himself as Bimal (Das) Gupta, who had been absconding after the murder of James Peddic, Magistrate of Midnapore. This was possibly a ruse to mislead the police who were then making a hectic search for Bimal, a member of the B.V. Bimal had nothing to do with Garlick whose assailant was really Kanai Bhattacharya of 24 Perganas. The identity of this revolutionary was established long after the shooting of Garlick. I have heard several reports of this incident which are slightly inconsistent but agree on essentials. It is my personal conviction that Mukti Sangha and B.V. were not very much interested in the politics of reprisal, but adopted the policy of spreading panic and paralysing the administration. Actions should be planned in such a way that the European community—officials and their supporters—lived in constant fear and the administration was hampered and undermined. Already the magistracy, the police and the prisons directorate had been assailed, and the onslaught on the judiciary might well have begun with the murder of Garlick who had sentenced Dinesh to death. That was all.

In any case, when these questions were being debated, a message came to Satyaranjan Bakshi from B.V. leaders who were then in Presidency Jail to the effect that the responsibility for disposing of Garlick had been undertaken by Satkari Banerji, one of the leaders of Jugantar, who too was in Presidency Jail then. All that the B.V. might have done was to supply Jugantar with helpful information about Garlick's movements, the opportune moment for getting him within close range, etc., and to procure arms, if necessary. Luckily Satkari Banerji was soon released on parole on account of his father's illness, and so he had no difficulty in sending Kanai Bhatta-

charya to do the deed, and both Garlick and Kanai were killed on 27 July 1931.

It would be doing injustice to Dinesh's memory if the story ended here with his death and Kanai's vengeance. I have made more than one reference to Dinesh's literary powers. Dinesh was a young man of many-sided talents who left his mark on the history of freedom by his organizing abilities, his courage and his martyrdom. But although a crack shot, he bungled his own death and met his end at the hands of a hangman. Yet the fact that he lived on for seven months has given him immortality of a different kind. While in the Condemned Cell, he wrote not only a short story which shows budding creative powers but also a series of letters to his mother Binodini Debi which reveal mature literary genius. When I read them first, I think, in the special Dinesh number of *Benu* published after his death, I could think of nothing comparable to them in literature except perhaps Cardinal Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, for they embalm the inner workings of a remarkable mind, excitable, passionate but serene. Consoling his mother, he wrote, 'Death is a guest whom everyone must greet uncomplainingly, some day or other; then why all this fretting and fuming? Because to me he has come a few days earlier than he was expected by our ordinary calculations? He who generally appears without notice would visit me on a day previously appointed. Is that any reason why I should not embrace him as a friend?' I apologize for my long-winded translation of the terse poignant phrases which may be compared with the prose writings of Bankim-chandra and Saratchandra at their best.

## Women in the Fray

It has already been pointed out that as the party's base at Dacca became firmly established, Hemchandra Ghose thought of making changes in his organization. First, the centre in Calcutta where he was in direct touch with his followers and also with Subhaschandra must be made stronger so that he could direct and control the party more effectively. Secondly, he felt that he could now expand the party's activities by starting branches in other parts of the province—both in towns and villages. But, as ever, he was a man whose first principle was efficiency and whose watchword was secrecy. That is why he would hasten slowly; as he took a step he would look before and after. He was also anxious to see that his disciples did not dissipate their energies in social and cultural activities which might have their own fascination and utility, but were, after all, only diversionary exercises. They deflected the revolutionary's interests from his chosen path; they meant also the introduction of outsiders, and this might imperil the secrecy of a revolutionary organization. Yet if a political party had to thrive, it must expand.

Hemchandra Ghose had already made the acquaintance of a remarkable young man named Rebati Barman who introduced to him another likely recruit, Lalit Barman of Comilla, who had a commendable record of diverse national service. As I look back on Lalit Barman's public record, I feel that this diversity was not only amazing but also somewhat disturbing, for with much of it Hemchandra Ghose was out of tune. As a non-cooperator, Barman had busied himself with *khadi* and *charkha*, but he had also done trade union work as an organizer of the A. B. Railway strike, for which he suffered a term of imprisonment. From trade union work among railway men, he passed on

to organization of labour in the tea plantations of Assam. During the mid-twenties, under the influence of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das he had started a society named Chittaranjan Jatiya Pratisthan for rendering various social services, and had gathered around him a body of dedicated volunteers. This organization had made an impact not only in Brahmanbaria but also in other parts of the district. Later on he took to Marxist studies and communist activities.

In the twenties social service occupied all of Lalit Barman's time, but it did not satisfy his soul which longed for national service more solid and more radical. Long before he drifted into such constructive social service or trade union activity, he had been initiated into the creed of armed revolution in 1914 by Sureshchandra Das of the Jugantar party. As his absorption in social and constructive work cut him off from his old revolutionary comrades, he also felt its inadequacy inasmuch as it did little to remove the curse of foreign domination. It was while he was in this divided mood that he received the call from Rebati Barman to meet Hemchandra Ghose. Satisfied with Lalit Barman's sincerity and organizational ability, Ghose took him into his fold, asking him to open a branch for revolutionary activity to be conducted according to his own ideas and plans. On returning to Brahmanbaria, Lalit Barman started a new society somewhat on the lines of Dacca Sri Sangha, giving it the name of Kalyan (Welfare) Sangha, which had its own gymnasium, library and reading room. But behind this cultural façade, recruitment and training of revolutionaries went on apace. The prominent figures in Chittaranjan Jatiya Pratisthan at Brahmanbaria were Manindra Pal, Barindra Ghose, Amulya and Apurva Dattaroy, Subodh Chaudhuri, Subodh Roy, Jyotirindran Nandy, Sudhangshu Bhattacharya and Amal Pal. As Lalit Barman was fully preoccupied with the social side of the two organizations and also because, I believe, his mind was gradually drifting towards Marxism, he could not give undivided attention to revolutionary political work. So in 1927-28 Nikunja Sen had to suspend his studies and move to Brahmanbaria to place Kalyan Sangha on a firm footing and make arrangements for the proper training of revolutionary recruits. But as Hemchandra Ghose's mind was now set upon extending revolutionary activities also into the rural areas, Nikunja Sen had soon

to be moved to Banari—my ancestral village—in the Munshigunge sub-division of Dacca district. When Nikunja left, his place in the Kalyan Sangha was taken by Sunil Sengupta, and revolutionary recruitment and training continued uninterrupted. Before long this wing spread out to the district town of Comilla where the leader was Birendra Bhattacharya, ably assisted by Akhil Nandy.

## II

Along with extension of branches outside Dacca, there was development in another line to which I have drawn attention earlier. It is the advent of women in the movement for the violent disruption of the British empire in India. The first women to take part in the freedom struggle—Sister Nivedita and Annie Besant—were of Irish origin, but they were Indians by adoption. Nivedita came in close touch with the revolutionaries, but she was not one of them. The same thing might be said of Annie Besant who had been detained by the British Indian authorities for her part in the Home Rule movement, in which she was associated with Balgangadhar Tilak. And when the Extremists recaptured the Congress ten years after the Surat split of 1907, she became the President of the Calcutta session in 1917. But both these heroic and noble women were too 'religious' to be called revolutionaries in the sense in which the term is used here. Sister Nivedita would have nothing to do with a smuggled, unlicensed revolver, and although herself a translator of the *Gita*, Annie Besant would not have justified Shivaji's assassination of Afjal Khan, as Tilak did, by saying that in the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna had counselled the disinterested killing even of one's elders and relations, and that since Shivaji liquidated Afjal Khan not for selfish ends but for the public good, no blame could attach to this deed.

The first woman martyr in the cause of revolution was Priyatilata Wadadar who on 24 September 1932 had led an armed raid on the European club of the A. B. Railway at Pahartali, a suburb of Chittagong, and died by self-administered poison after completing her assignment. But she does not seem to be the first woman in the field. It is believed that as an Intermediate student at Dacca she had been initiated into the cult of revolu-

tion by Dipali Sangha, which, after Lila Nag's meeting with Hemchandra Ghose in 1925 described earlier, had become a full-fledged revolutionary organization, working as the women's branch of Sri Sangha. So the credit for pioneering women's association with revolutionary work must go to Lila Nag, later Mrs Lila Roy. There was a misleading report that Priti participated in the Chittagong Armoury Raid, in which, in fact, no woman was involved. Priti met the great Surya Sen long after the event and was thus a gift to the Chittagong organization from Dipali Sangha of Dacca and Chhatri Sangha of Calcutta.

In the late twenties and during the thirties women had begun to take an active part in revolutionary organization. So far as the present narrative is concerned, after the split in the party described in the preceding chapter, the women's wing of the B.V. shifted its central organization to Calcutta, and the leading worker was Mira Dattagupta who had already been pursuing revolutionary programmes and was actively connected with the journal *Benu*. Other notable organizers were Kamala Dasgupta and Ujjala Majumdar. Whatever their party loyalties, some of the spirited women who took part in overt action have justly acquired celebrity for their courage and sacrifice. But women workers and sympathizers who have lived in obscurity and have not shed the veil of privacy have played a part no less significant in a movement which rests primarily on secrecy. Women provided shelter for absconders, helped conceal arms and acted as messengers or agents of communication, because although their movements were restricted, these were largely hidden from the watchful eyes of informers. An equally important contribution made by women was that they also replenished party funds. Women are notoriously fond of ornaments and who amongst us has not laughed over Gray's gibe:

What female heart can gold despise?  
What cat's averse to fish?

But women, especially Indian women of the present age, have most readily given away their gold when they have felt that this could be used in the service of the country. Thanks to Ananta Singh who did not want to bring the softer sex into the turmoil of revolutionary activity, Surya Sen's movement in the initial



stages was purely a masculine affair. But after Jalalabad the great leader did accept feminine service, which was signalized by Pritilata Wadedar's martyrdom. I have it also on very reliable authority that many women sent their gold ornaments through Kalpana Datta and other volunteers, thus making a substantial contribution to the later activities of the party.

The B.V. had, as I have already stated, made striking progress among girls, particularly girl students of schools and colleges. In the late twenties, this movement gained momentum and spread to various centres. Women helped in many ways, most notably in supplying finance in the shape of gold ornaments. There is even a slightly comic lining to this heroic tale. In the initial stage, girl recruits, especially from middle and upper class families, began reporting loss of an ear-ring or some other small trinket from time to time and got away with a mild reprimand. But as party propaganda seeped into the circle of elders, matrons too gladly gifted away costly ornaments. Newspapers and books have given glowing accounts of how women in Southeast Asia, mostly of Indian origin, cheerfully donated their jewellery, which almost constituted a treasure-chest, when Netaji marched towards India at the head of the I.N.A. But only Satyaranjan Bakshi's trusted lieutenants know how Bengali women hastened to offer their ornaments in order to finance Subhaschandra's safe exit from the country.

The Action Squad of the B.V. first showed their mettle at Dacca and Writers' Buildings—both in 1930. Preparations were afoot in other places too, notably at Midnapore, of which more will be said later on. As in the present narrative I am concerned with women, it would be appropriate to describe in detail what happened at Comilla where girls played an important role. Revolutionaries, even when they act separately, often move along the same lines. After the Chittagong Armoury Raid, the Lowman-Hodson affair and the onslaught on Writers' Buildings, the leaders seemed to think of actions that would paralyse the administration in the sprawling districts of Bengal. Surya Sen himself did not move out from the recesses of rural Chittagong, but he wanted to shift his party's activities to neighbouring districts also. In pursuance of this plan, his followers seriously wounded L. Durno, the District Magistrate of Dacca, who, if I remember aright, lost an eye, and the Addl. Super-

intendent of Police, Ellison, was shot dead at Comilla. Another party disposed of District Judge Garlick at Alipore, who had sentenced Dinesh Gupta and Ramakrishna Biswas to death.

The murder of Ellison and the attack on Durno, both the work of Surya Sen's party at nearby Chittagong, served as an incentive for the B.V. branch at Comilla led by Biren Bhattacharya and Akhil Nandy. It had a band of determined, dedicated boys, but the most remarkable member of this set was Praphullanalini Brahma, a woman hardly, I believe, out of her teens. She recruited some girls of the local school and inspired them with her courage and revolutionary idealism. The action contemplated by this group was the liquidation of G. T. S. Stevens, the District Magistrate, but the initial problem was that of money. So far the work of the party had been carried on with funds made up of small donations from sympathizers and the sale of small gold trinkets donated by girls. But a major action required a large sum of money, and the only means of finding it was looting Government revenue. But this was a hazardous affair which might imperil the achievement of the end.

Luckily an easy way out was suggested by one of the boys in the party who was a close relation of a responsible employee in the Brahmanbaria Post Office. He daily watched how money was sent to the Government Treasury, and it was not difficult for him to know when a large sum of money was due to be transferred. This boy brought information that on 5 March 1931 a sum of fifty thousand rupees would be deposited in the Treasury. Biren Bhattacharya with a handful of boys lay in wait for the postal party. So accurate was the information and so swift the movement of the 'volunteers' that it was inside the Post Office itself that the bag was seized in broad daylight, and the young men decamped with the money before the police could get into action. It cannot be too often repeated that one of the aims of Hemchandra Ghose's disciples was to recruit boys whose names were not in the police list and to finish an action without leaving any clue that could be taken up by the enemy.

The adventure was a complete success but not unmingled with a touch of disappointment, for opening the bag Birendra Bhattacharya found that the haul was not fifty thousand but twenty-five thousand, and that even of these twenty-five thou-

sand rupees many notes were halves of ten-rupee notes, a precaution that was at that time taken by Post offices so that prospective dacoits might be foiled and befooled. Even so, the young men had collected enough for the action contemplated, and with this money Biren Bhattacharya hurried to Calcutta to contact Supati Roy who was the leader's deputy for the affairs of the branches outside Calcutta. The necessary arms and ammunition—two revolvers and cartridges—were, as usual, purchased from smugglers, and Biren returned to Comilla.

It was decided that two girls, studying in class VIII of the local Faizunnessa Girls' School, would undertake the action. There were many grounds for selecting them. It was thought that girls would have a relatively easy access to the District Magistrate's sanctum, in office or bungalow, which in those days used to be very securely guarded. Secondly, the appearance of girls in the arena would have an inspiring, thrilling effect on womenfolk, whose co-operation was becoming increasingly useful. Thirdly, it would have a greater impact on the administrators whom the movement wanted to overawe. However, there were risks too, for these young girls might bungle or, what was more likely, make a confession when caught. But Akhil Nandy felt sure of his callow recruits—Suniti Chaudhuri and Santi Ghose—who he knew would not let them down. He secretly took them to Mainamati hills not far off from the town, taught them how to handle a revolver and gave them some target practice.

On the fateful day, 14 December 1931, Suniti and Santi left their homes ostensibly to join their class in the school, but Satish Roy, a trusted lieutenant of Akhil Nandy and Praphullalalini Brahma, escorted them in a hackney carriage to the District Magistrate's bungalow and deposited them near the entrance. As it was a chilly December morning, they had each a wrapper which served to conceal the loaded revolvers they carried underneath the blouses they wore. They sent in a chit of paper seeking an interview with the District Magistrate, who was closeted in the office-room with his Sub-Divisional Officer. Instead of calling them into his room, as they had expected, the Magistrate came out with the S.D.O. into the verandah to meet them. This temporarily upset their plan. However, they spoke of some swimming event for girl students and handed over an

application to the Magistrate, who said that he would refer the matter to the Headmistress and then returned to his room with the S.D.O. The girls were at a loss as to what to do next, for the application was only a ruse, and the Magistrate might put down his comments on it and send it back to them through an attendant, which would mean that the adventure would end abortively. And what might be worse, the Headmistress might warn off the District Magistrate against such intruders. Luckily, the unsuspecting Magistrate, accompanied once again by the S.D.O., came out into the verandah with the application on which possibly he had written down his comments. In a moment Suniti and Santi, who would not miss a second opportunity, brought out their revolvers from under their blouses and shot the District Magistrate dead. They were immediately arrested, and though convicted on trial, were given a sentence of transportation for life rather than capital punishment in view of their tender age. What is remarkable is that no threat or torture or persuasion could make them open their lips, and the Government could get no clue to the movements of the party whose instrument they were. Praphullanalini Brahma was arrested the following day, possibly because she had been seen with these girls, but as she could not in any way be connected with the incident she was let off on 22 March 1932. She was, however, immediately rearrested and taken into custody as a detenu. It was as a detenu that she passed the Intermediate and B.A. examinations, but while interned at Comilla, she died of appendicitis on 22 February 1937 without receiving any medical attention worth mentioning.

## The Midnapore Saga, 1927-1934

As I have said, when Hemchandra Ghose was certain that a firm organization had been built up in and around Dacca, he and his advisers felt that they might start branches elsewhere, and Midnapore naturally suggested itself as a place with many advantages for revolutionary work. First of all, it was not far from Calcutta so that he and his top aides could easily supervise what was going on there and the local workers could also swiftly contact the centre whenever necessary. A second advantage was the nearness of Kharagpore, one of the most important junctions on what was then known as the Bengal Nagpur Railway, and so convenient for ingress and egress. In the twenties, some of the hard-core members of the cadre—Nikunja Sen, Sasanka Dasgupta, Binoy Sengupta—had an army of relations serving in various capacities in the railway station, railway workshop and railway hospital. So they and their friends could easily visit Kharagpore on one pretext or another, and young men from Midnapore were always cycling to and from Kharagpore. They realized too that when occasion would arise, the quarters of these relations might serve as excellent temporary shelters for absconders. Thirdly, Midnapore had a good record of political activity, though in the twenties this record, thanks to the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, was mostly a record of non-violent work, but that also was an indication of patriotic fervour which could be diverted to other channels. Nor should it be forgotten that Kshudiram, Satyen Bose and Hemchandra Kanungo, associates of Aurobindo and Barindra, hailed from Midnapore.

Considering the facilities that Midnapore offered, an important member of the party, Dinesh Gupta, was sent there in 1928 to explore the possibilities of revolutionary work.

Dinesh's elder brother Jyotish Gupta was a rising lawyer at Midnapore and Dinesh opened a new chapter in revolutionary history by getting himself admitted as a second-year student in Midnapore College. He was wondering how to make initial contact with the young men of the place when an opportunity offered itself. He heard of a public meeting convened by local Christians at the Y.M.C.A. Hall to which his elder brother and other notabilities had been invited, and he went there on his own. The subject matter of discussion was 'The Place of Religion in Man's Life', but Dinesh soon discovered that the real purpose of the organizers was to run down Hinduism and ancient Indian culture. We now know that this bold young man also had a fervid imagination and exceptional literary talents. Here he at once got up to oppose these traducers of the national heritage, and raised a veritable storm that put these contemptible people to flight. At the end of the meeting or what remained of the meeting, Dinesh found himself at the centre of a group of young men who discovered in him the hero they were looking for—intrepid, eloquent and charismatic.

The initial success described above gave a flying start to the movement Dinesh had in view. Coming in contact with him, young men of schools and colleges got a taste of a new life, and soon there sprang up clubs and libraries in various localities of the town, which were only a cover for the promotion of new revolutionary activity that was very different from spinning *khadi*. Dinesh was a leader of exceptional ability who aroused a sense of dedication and discipline so deep and firm that the series of breathtaking 'actions' that later on shook the steel-frame of the British Empire were undertaken long after Dinesh had left Midnapore, and a year after he had departed this life. The drills, marches and parades that he organized in protest against the Simon Commission and then in honour of Jatin Das, who courted a martyr's death in prison in September 1929, produced a new animation in the town. He also convened in December a Youth Conference of which Subhaschandra was President. Subhaschandra was visibly moved by all that he saw, and I believe he sensed more than he saw.

Dinesh's enthusiasm was so infectious that not only did he organize a band of dedicated workers at Midnapore but he was also instrumental in establishing branches at Contai and

Kharagpore—the former under Haripada Bhowmick and the latter under Biren Ghose. When Dinesh was called away from Midnapore for more pressing work at Dacca and in Calcutta, his mantle fell on Sasanka Dasgupta who conducted the organization along the same lines. It may be truly said that there soon arose at Midnapore a band of workers the like of whom few had seen elsewhere or at any other time. They were dedicated and determined patriots who would move swiftly and silently, would take a life as easily as embrace a martyr's death, and whatever happened, they would never open their lips to imperil a comrade or let down the party. Who were these young patriots? I should specially mention Bimal Dasgupta, Jyotijivan and Nirmaljivan Ghose, Pradyot Bhattacharya, Prabhanshu Pal, Brajakishore Chakraborti, Ramakrishna Roy, Parimal Roy, Phani Kundu, Amar Chatterji, Sudhir Pattanayak, Naren Das, Phani Das, Anath Panja, Nirmal Roy, Kamakshya Ghose, Bhupati Sen, Mrigen Datta, Bhupati Mandal, Benod Sen, Sanatan Roy, Amar Sen, Chandrasekhar Sen, and Santigopal Sen, but there were many others too.

Incomplete as the present narrative is, it would be even more so if I do not remember here the women, many of them elderly, who helped these youths with money, often arranged shelters and, more importantly, inspired them with confidence. First to be mentioned is Prabasaranjini Debi, mother of Jyotijivan and Nirmaljivan, who reminds me of the Roman mother who said to her soldier-son that he must return from the battlefield 'with the shield or upon it'. Then there was the old aunt of Kshiti-prasanna Sen, wife of Ambikaprasanna Sen, the leading advocate of Midnapore, who was later externed from the place because his large house was allegedly a den of 'terrorists'. Dinesh had an elderly sister—Santi Sen—who with their sister-in-law, lawyer Jyotish Gupta's wife, Kusumrenu, would speed Dinesh and his comrades on their perilous journey as did some other ladies, among them Amar Sen's mother and Rama Sen, Uma Sen and Charusila Debi. It would be fair to claim that if the Midnapore revolutionaries acted as a compact body that seldom made a wrong move, it was in no small measure due to the silent, secret support of these and other women.

## II

After Dinesh Gupta had been called away from Midnapore, the mantle of local leadership, as I have said, fell on his old classmate and my nephew Sasanka Dasgupta, popularly known as 'Comet' because he was born in 1910, the year in which Halley's Comet appeared in the Indian sky. After the two raids at Dacca and in Calcutta, the Action Squad felt that it would be tactically advisable for the party to keep a low profile in these two places. As there was a well-built cadre at Midnapore, it was decided that it was here that they should challenge the enemy. Midnapore had become an ideal place for overt revolutionary activity in the early thirties for yet another—and an adventitious—reason which I have already mentioned. The armed revolutionaries could sow and reap where the soil had been prepared by non-violent activities. The Civil Disobedience movement that was launched in 1930 had made a wide and deep impact on the sprawling district of Midnapore—one of the largest in India, where the people had a taste of ruthless bureaucratic tyranny. One of the architects of this brutality was James Peddie, District Magistrate, who, I know from officers who worked with him, was a tyrant with a difference. He was a man of boundless energy who would try to do all that he could to help the people, and yet he was merciless towards the *badmashes*—he meant the Gandhi-ites—who had raised the standard of revolt against the Government. As a District Magistrate, his powers of doing good were very limited, and most of his proposals were turned down as utopian by his own superiors in the Secretariat. But as the principal officer responsible for maintenance of law and order, he had immense scope for mischief, and people had to bear with whippings, *lathi*-charges, firings and also rape and arson. Thus Peddie, although a well-intentioned man, soon acquired a notoriety for the reign of terror that was let loose to cope with the Civil Disobedience movement launched in 1930. It is needless to repeat that the B.V. leader was not interested in the politics of individual punishment but in shaking and breaking the Civil Service advertised as the steel-frame of the British Empire. Yet, as will be clear from the detailed itinerary of Binoy Bose from his collecting firearms from Animesh Roy's house at Dacca to his



taking part in the raid on Writers' Buildings in Calcutta 'a hundred days' later, the armed anarchist requires the assistance of many people, and he can work effectively only in a sympathetic and congenial environment. Such an environment had been created in Midnapore district by Gandhi's followers and governmental oppression. Peddie and his cohorts helped the revolutionaries in yet another way. The bureaucracy were so busy with the active supporters of Civil Disobedience that they had no idea that a more dangerous party had grown up under their nose and had succeeded in completely hoodwinking them. On behalf of the Action Squad, Praphulla Datta was put in charge of operations in Midnapore, and he kept in constant touch with Sasanka Dasgupta and the other top men in the area.

On 10 February 1931, at a secret meeting held on the bank of the lonely Kasai river and attended by Sasanka, Phani Kundu, Jyotijivan Ghose and Bimal Dasgupta, the directions from the Action Squad were discussed in detail, and it was decided that the first target would be James Peddie who was to be liquidated by Jyotijivan Ghose and Bimal Dasgupta. The same night Phani and Bimal arrived at Kharagpore by the Down Purulia Passenger and received firearms and necessary directions of the Action Squad from Manoranjan Sengupta who was sent by Nikunja Sen from Calcutta. Learning that a meeting of the District Board would be held at 1 p.m. on 11 February and that the District Magistrate would be present there, Bimal and Jyoti remained in readiness at a point of vantage a few minutes before the scheduled time. But they were disappointed, for on account of some urgent work the District Magistrate, who had come to the D.B. Office, had left long before the meeting was due to begin.

The next opportunity came on the first of April when, it was learnt, the Magistrate would inaugurate a students' exhibition at the Collegiate School, but this opportunity too did not materialize, because, as he was held up elsewhere, the Additional District Magistrate, an Indian, deputized for him. But Jyotijivan and Bimal, who had not slackened their vigilance, were sure that as Peddie was very particular about his official obligations and very much interested in the spread of education—in those days of deprovincialization he was bent on provincial-

izing the local college—he would certainly visit the exhibition some day before it was over. And they received definite information that on 7 April, the closing day, the District Magistrate would be there, and now it was their duty to see that he did not return alive. Mr Peddie arrived at dusk, and in the gathering darkness the organizers of the exhibition began showing him round with the help of two hurricane lanterns. As he entered the second room after seeing the exhibits in the first, the sound of a bullet was heard and Mr Peddie put his hand to his back where he had been hit. As shots rained upon him, people fled pell-mell, and Jyotijivan and Bimal safely made their way to the open road and escaped without trouble. Peddie was still reeling under the blows when the organizers who had been showing him round returned and heard him mumbling, 'The police were not aware of the existence of such a party.' With this he fell down unconscious. All succour was useless; Peddie died in a hospital within a few hours.

Although the action was deftly managed, there was one minor clue which might have had serious consequences. As Jyoti and Bimal ran away, a small boy shouted 'Bimalda!' Bimal and Jyoti, however, escaped in safety to Salboni railway station from where they took train to Purulia. Next day they came to Calcutta from Purulia after nightfall and took shelter first in a sweetmeat shop in Shyambazar owned by Sailendra Kundu of Midnapore. The next day they moved to 10A Sham Square Lane, the house of Manoranjan Sengupta, who had earlier gone to Kharagpore with firearms. From there they contacted the Action Squad who decided that Jyotijivan might safely return to Midnapore and resume his normal routine of life, which he did, as nobody made any enquiries about him. Bimal also visited Midnapore once, but finding that the police were looking for him, returned to Calcutta and placed himself under the protection of the Action Squad.

### III

Government, although somewhat non-plussed by the unexpected attack on Peddie and the complete failure of their agencies to arrest the assailants and their associates, tried to put up a brave show, and tutored propagandists began a curious

campaign, saying that this was no revolution but a cowardly(!) attack on an unarmed 'gentleman'. It was also pointless; for one European Magistrate, they said, would be followed by another and the authorities would see that there would be no scope again for an assault by a secret assassin. So Peddie was succeeded by Robert Douglas, one Britisher by another, and it was said that the caravan would march on. That this was not the case was later on revealed by the letters which the new Magistrate wrote to his brother, a professor at Rajmuhndry College in what is now Andhra Pradesh. As Magistrate of Midnapore, Douglas was just a bundle of nerves, living in hourly fear of death.

Government, of course, did not relax their precautions, for the new Magistrate was guarded at all hours, on left and right, with a third armed escort moving behind him so that he might not be shot in the back like Peddie. But the revolutionaries, whom Government had failed to track, were alert and active too. They realized that on this occasion the Magistrate must be attacked frontally in broad daylight. Shakespeare says that security is mortal's chiefest enemy, and there is a Bengali saying that just underneath the flaming lamp, it is all dark. So in broad daylight at half-past five on 30 April 1932, when Robert Douglas was presiding over a meeting of the District Board, with a sentry on the right and a sentry on the left and his own loaded revolver on his table before him, the members were startled by the sound of shots and Douglas fell down on the ground, riddled with bullets fired by people who had entered by the front door. There was general panic, some of the men present fled this way and that, and others who could not flee crouched under the table. Only two persons were found standing erect—Pradyot Bhattacharya and Prabhanshu Pal. When they were certain that there was no chance of Douglas returning to life, they came out into the street and began to run.

It is only now that the two sentries of Douglas began to pursue them, and others also joined the chase—policemen, Mr George, S.D.O. of Tamluk, the S.D.O. of Contai, etc. Pradyot and Prabhanshu, who were running northwards, came near Amar Lodge when Prabhanshu managed to escape through a narrow lane, and he could neither be apprehended nor identified. Pradyot realized that his revolver was out of

action and he would not be able to use it unless he had time to mend and reload it. So he hid himself in a room in an abandoned house and was soon overpowered and arrested. After a search of his person, the police recovered a chit of paper on which was written—'A feeble protest against the vandalism at Hijli'. This has a little history of its own which needs to be told here if only for the sake of completeness.

On 16 September 1931 there was a most savage outrage on state prisoners, all detained without trial in the Hijli Camp, in course of which Santosh Mitra and Tarakeshwar Sengupta were killed on the spot and twenty others were seriously injured. This mini-Jallianwalla Bagh rampage sent a thrill of indignation throughout the country and Subhaschandra organized demonstrations in which Tagore himself joined. Soon after this the poet wrote a poem entitled 'A Question', which he addresses to God. I shall render only the concluding couplet here:

Have you forgiven those who are poisoning the air  
and extinguishing the light you have created?  
And can you, O Lord of Love, bestow your affection  
on these men?

The B.V. as a party did not believe in the politics of reprisal or in the policy of punishing individual offenders. The Action Squad did not think of the Hijli outrage when they deputed Pradyot and Prabhanshu to kill Douglas who had nothing to do with it. But Pradyot was inordinately fond of Tagore's poetry which he loved to recite to others and would also murmur to himself. It is also said that from his prison cell where he was awaiting death, he wrote two letters to the poet which, presumably, the poet never received. I think that although Pradyot performed the deed under the direction of the Action Squad, he also derived inspiration and strength from Tagore's moving poem 'A Question', which is one of the treasures of literature and for sentiment, diction and rhythmic beauty might find a place in any anthology of great poetry.

As Pradyot was taken alive, he received official attention in various ways. Pressure was put upon him to make him disclose the names of his comrade, his associates in general and of the leaders who must have been at the back of the adventure. The situation was indeed intriguing, because the bullets that were

extracted from the body of the victim were on examination found to have been fired not from Pradyot's revolver which might have gone out of action at the crucial moment. So a plausible case was made out that if he told the other man's name, he would certainly be let off or given a light sentence. Such specious pleas could have no weight with a man who had deliberately allowed his friend to escape through a narrow lane only to attract the attention of the pursuers to himself. Pradyot's sense of humour did not leave him even when he was passing his days in the disagreeable company of policemen who allowed him no respite and constantly pressed him to speak out. 'Why did an intelligent man like you use a revolver', asked a policeman named Bhupen Banerji, 'that did not respond at the right moment?' 'Sheer irony of fate, Bhupen Babu. If my revolver had spoken, I would not have been here, nor would you have had any chance of speaking to me.'

Prabhanshu Pal escaped unnoticed, and no enquiry was even made at his maternal uncle's house where he used to stay. Still, as the party leadership wanted him to keep away from Midnapore for a few days, he came to Calcutta—ostensibly to escort his sister Nilima—and suffered mild harassment at the hands of the Calcutta police. Completely hoodwinked, the police at Midnapore now fell upon the young men who were often found in Pradyot's company, such as Phani Das, Kshiti-prasanna Sen and Naren Das. They were all members of the B.V., and Phani Das did have a part in the Douglas affair. Police thought that these young men, particularly Phani Das, must be in the know of things and subjected them to continued torture. Phani was so mercilessly beaten and tortured that he fainted; the police feared that he was dead, and so did the Civil Surgeon at first sight. But by degrees Phani recovered consciousness and limped back to life. Naren Das and Kshitiprasanna Sen too were subjected to unspeakable cruelty, but not a word escaped their lips. That was the common characteristic of all members of the B.V., a seamless party of dedicated men who could never betray one another. The police realized this and so adopted a different plan afterwards, but that will be taken up later on in this narrative.

When nothing could be got out of Pradyot or the other men apprehended in course of police enquiry, Government con-

stituted a Special Tribunal, consisting of K. C. Nag, Jnanankur De and B. Mustafi, to try Pradyot on a charge of murder. As expected, the Tribunal sentenced him to death, and the sentence was later confirmed by the High Court. What was unexpected was the dissentient judgement of Jnanankur De, who on the ground that the bullet that killed Douglas had not been fired by Pradyot, suggested the lesser sentence of life imprisonment. The dissentient judgement was a rift in the solid phalanx of the bureaucracy. Pradyot, who had received the sentence calmly saying that through death he would rise to immortality, was executed on 12 January 1933.

#### IV

Pradyot's execution aroused mixed feelings—of sorrow for a valuable life lost, adoration for the hero who did not betray his friend or his party, and also a wave of enthusiasm amongst the B.V. men and their sympathizers. They now vowed that no European Magistrate would be allowed to rule Midnapore. In April 1931, James Peddie, and in April 1932, Robert Douglas! What was there in store for April 1933? Indeed, lullabies were composed and circulated, supposedly for the convenience of British mothers:

‘Sleep, oh baby, sleep, Binoy, Badal, Dinesh are coming.’  
or, ‘Sleep, oh baby, sleep, the month of April is coming.’

Leaflets with Pradyot's portrait inset were distributed all over Bengal, and it is said that amongst officials it was often asked, ‘What would happen in April 1933?’ April seemed, indeed, to be the ‘cruellest month’ of the year, as T.S. Eliot might have said.

The Action Squad of the B.V., however, wanted to hasten slowly. The leaders in Calcutta insisted that action should be effective rather than spectacular. Another English Magistrate B. E. J. Burge succeeded Robert Douglas, but Midnapore was now honeycombed with policemen in uniform and in mufti, and one did not know who was not a spy. The Action Squad was also handicapped by depletion in their ranks, for the police had taken into custody all young men who were accused of having some connexion with political activity, and since the net

was cast very wide, along with others many B.V. boys were immured too. Yet the Action Squad did not lose heart; their organization was intact, and there were many volunteers yet untouched. They allowed the month of April to pass by, and noted with glee that during the thirty days of this month Burge did not stir out at all. That showed—and the Douglas letters, soon published, made it more clear—that bureaucratic nerves were shaken, but it was also expected that after April Burge would begin to act in a more relaxed manner.

On account of large-scale arrests at the top, Brajakishore Chakraborti was now the local leader and he was assisted by Prabhanshu Pal and Ramakrishna Roy. Prabhanshu was in charge of maintaining the line of communication with the central leadership in Calcutta where Jyotish Guha, recently released from detention, was in charge. Brajakishore Chakraborti assisted by Ramakrishna Roy directed the operations at Midnapore. In May, Burge began to come out of his seclusion by and by, which was heartening for the revolutionaries, for he would move more freely as time passed. Brajakishore entrusted Mrigen Dutta and Anath Panja with the task for which the party had been getting ready for some time. Information reached them that there would be an Exhibition football match on 8 August 1933 between Mohan Bagan of Calcutta and the Town Club of Midnapore captained by Mr Burge himself. Unfortunately for Anath and Mrigen who came to the football ground fully prepared, the Magistrate did not turn up, and the plan fell through. They tried to seize the next opportunity which offered itself on 19 August when the Magistrate came, as scheduled, to attend a meeting of the Flood Relief Committee at the Central Bank, but he left in a hurry and the revolutionaries were foiled again.

Then there was the last big match of the football season to be played between Mohammedan Sporting Club and the Town Club on 2 September and on this occasion there was definite information that the Magistrate would come and participate. This match was to be played on the police ground, supposedly a safe place where revolutionaries would not dare barge in, and not only were there elaborate security arrangements, but all the European officers stationed at Midnapore would play for the Town Club. Moreover, the locality was safe,

because on one side of the ground was the jail and on the other the police armoury. So neither the police nor the Magistrate and the officials were prepared for the terrible surprise that would be sprung on them. At about half past four, some players were on the ground as usual for preliminary practice, but amongst them were also Mrigen and Anath, kicking the ball and picking it up when it went outside. Far from suspecting their ulterior objective, no one even took any notice of their (unwanted) presence.

Then came the regular players—Addl. Police Superintendent Norton Jones, and after him Captain Linton and then the Civil Surgeon, followed by Reserve Inspector Smith. As these Europeans were engaged in conversation, Magistrate Burge entered at 5.15 p.m. with his two sentries, one on either side of him. No sooner had Burge come to the ground than Mrigen and Anath, who had taken up their positions, shot at him from both sides—Mrigen from the west and Anath from the north-east. Not a bullet missed its aim and Burge fell on the ground. With lightning speed Anath rushed upon him and fired again to make sure that he was dead. Most of the other players fled but not Norton Jones and Inspector Smith. As Jones advanced upon Mrigen, he proceeded to grapple with him while the sentries and policemen began firing upon the two assailants. Anath was killed instantaneously and Mrigen was declared dead when he was carried to the hospital.

## V

The killing of James Peddie, a ruthless but well-meaning despot, Robert Douglas, a nervous nonentity, and B. E. J. Burge, a pleasant, clubbable gentleman but also a ready instrument of a hateful system, constituted, after all, a grim episode redeemed by the self-sacrificing courage and faultless efficiency of a group of patriots. The weakness of the apparently mighty colonial structure was nowhere so thoroughly exposed as at Midnapore. Three British Magistrates were killed in three years, and the Civil Service and the police force with their elaborate machinery and enormous power could do nothing either to prevent these outrages or to unravel the workings of the organization responsible for them.



What followed exposed the other side of imperialism—its brutality, its hypocrisy, its unscrupulousness. Mrigen and Anath were killed, or better still, they embraced death without speaking a word, as had Pradyot before them. The police now set about making out a case to show that they had unearthed the secrets of this party which they now proceeded to root out, and in this diabolic enterprise they betrayed both their folly and their inventive genius. Everyone at Midnapore knew the ebullient Dinesh Gupta who had come from Dacca and, having built up a student organization at Midnapore, had gone back to Dacca and then joined Badal Gupta and Binoy Bose. That was a suggestive clue which led the Midnapore Police to Dacca-based young men like Sasanka Dasgupta and their associates, local and imported, notably Jyotijivan Ghose. I, who was equidistant from police terrorism and revolutionary adventurism, heard a floating rumour in Calcutta that while there was a mad search for Bimal Dasgupta, the alleged assailant of James Peddie, Bimal's associate Jyotijivan was moving freely round Midnapore. In course of time this gossip must have reached the sapient policemen of Midnapore too. That was a clue which made them rummage the house and harass the children of Jaminijivan Ghose, Jyotijivan's father and a leading advocate of Midnapore. By 1933-34 it was too late to bring a case against Jyotijivan, but they could haul up his younger brothers Nirmaljivan and Navajivan. So they, along with many of their friends, were arrested, but in spite of the application of third degree methods they remained tight-lipped.

I have never been to Midnapore but have had some idea of the goings on there, particularly about the confessions that were being extracted at this time. On the fateful day of Burge's murder, one of my close friends, P. M. Das Gupta, then second officer, Sadar Subdivision, was present on the football ground along with the Magistrate. Some time after, a group of policemen brought to his house a handcuffed young man who in the same breath wanted a glass of water to drink and also to make an immediate confession. After a few minutes, asking the policemen to wait, my friend rose to take the young man to another room, but the policemen strongly objected. However, ignoring their protests, this magistrate, who was to record the confession, took the young man to an inner room. After he gave

due warning and assurance to the young man, particularly that after making his statement he would not be handed over to the police again, the youth took off his shirt and showed how he had been struck on every limb of his body, adding that after such treatment and having passed three sleepless days and nights with little food or drink, he had agreed to say whatever he might be asked to say. In fact, he had nothing to declare except his injuries. When after recording the young man's statement this magistrate sent him to judicial custody, the police left his house in high dudgeon. Within a week he had to face the music himself. He was summoned by the Additional District Magistrate who confronted him in the company of some high officials who had specially come from Calcutta. He was reprimanded, chastised and abused by these high-ups when he pointed out that he had only followed the provisions of the Penal Code. Only the Additional Magistrate feebly supported him on the ground that that was the law on recording of confessions, but the others summarily turned him out as a disloyal public servant. He was peremptorily transferred to Dinajpore. I heard this tale from my friend, now deceased, many years ago, but as I am writing these lines I have got it confirmed by his widow who was an eye-witness to all that happened inside their own house.

The police, out to wreak vengeance, must have started with Jyotijivan Ghose serving as a reliable clue, which led them to Jyotijivan's younger brother Nirmaljivan, an associate of Burge's assailants. They got hold of one of Nirmal's companions who was, however, not connected with the party in any way, By the application of third degree methods or by other means, the police forced him to give evidence as an approver. It is usual for approvers to give out a story tailored to suit the police case, and this man unravelled a complex conspiracy involving Nirmaljivan, Brajakishore Chakraborti, Ramakrishna Roy, Kamakshya Ghose, Sanatan Roy, Sukumar Sen, Nandadulal Sinha, and Santigopal Sen. As Santigopal Sen was then in hiding, the others were hauled up before a Special Tribunal presided over by Judge Waight. A later Special Tribunal pre-presided over by K. C. Chunder tried Santigopal when he was arrested. Relying primarily on the approver's evidence, confirmed by witnesses not difficult to produce, the first Tribunal

awarded capital punishment to Nirmaljivan, Brajakishore, and Ramakrishna and life imprisonment to Kamakshya Ghose, Sanatan Roy, Sukumar Sen and Nandadulal Sinha in February 1934, and the sentences were confirmed by the High Court. The second Tribunal awarded life sentence to Santigopal Sen—who was, incidentally, a relation of mine.

The account given above may appear to be biased against the police and the tribunals, and also against the witnesses produced by Government. But although I plead guilty to a bias in favour of these boys, I have little doubt that the trial was largely a faked affair. The key figure in the killing of Douglas and Burge was Prabhanshu Pal who, and not Pradyot, fired the bullets that killed Douglas, and it was he who might be said to be second-in-command in 'Operation Burge' in which the leader was, of course, Brajakishore Chakraborti, who was assisted also by Ramakrishna Roy. Any person well informed on this subject could not be ignorant about the part played by Prabhanshu. It may be said that the tribunals had not the hindsight which can be claimed by people surveying these events more than forty years after their occurrence. But that is the privilege of history which has a wider perspective than can be claimed even by actual participants, not excluding those who prosecute and punish. It is strange that the witnesses knew where Nirmaljivan and other party men waited on 2 September or where he and the assailants met on the previous day to decide on the killing of Burge, but they had no knowledge of the part played by Prabhanshu Pal, whose crime or contribution was infinitely more substantial than that of Nirmaljivan for whom the police demanded and secured capital punishment. As will be clear from the above account, the so-called meeting on 1 September was never held, because it was in May that Brajakishore, the man-in-charge, had ordered Mrigen and Anath to dispose of Burge at the earliest opportunity, and the football match of 2 September was such a gala festival that it was not necessary for Nirmaljivan to go to the secretary of the Town Club to fish out this information. No sane person would do this, because the secretary of the Town Club might caution the District Magistrate, and if there was an attempt on his life, the secretary of this Club, of which the Magistrate was President, was bound to be interrogated. It is true that the men sentenced

were members of the party, but no one except Brajakishore, Prabhanshu and Ramakrishna—barring, of course, the two assailants—was immediately involved in it. It is not the way with revolutionary organizations to take in more people in an operation than are indispensable.

I shall take leave of this topic after making one more comment. From the topography of the venue of Burge's murder I have given above, it will be evident that Brajakishore and Prabhanshu, the leading figures who directed this action, knew very well that escape was improbable, and posting party volunteers along predetermined routes of escape was out of the question. Neither did the idea of flight occur to Anath and Mrigen. The former wanted to make sure that Burge was dead and Mrigen turned back to assail Norton Jones. The prosecution story about Nirmaljivan and others taking positions in different places to help the assailants to escape was trumped up only to secure conviction for a large number of suspected revolutionaries. Equally absurd was the prosecution evidence that Brajakishore was present somewhere in the vicinity to give a signal to Anath and Mrigen to shoot. As the assailants would be very near their victim on the football ground, they would know best when to act. Waiting for a signal from someone at a considerable distance from them would only put the venture in jeopardy. Brajakishore was, no doubt, the architect of the whole affair, but it is well known that in modern warfare the field-marshal is never present in the field.

## VI

Having wreaked vengeance on the young patriots, the authorities now proceeded to harass the local people, particularly the families of the revolutionaries. Curfew was clamped on the town and the military was called out to assist civil administration. As there was no riot or any breach of peace, all this was intended to terrorize peaceful citizens, and it was a strange way, I am inclined to say, of preventing assaults similar to those already made. But hell was let loose, and there was scarcely a Hindu household amongst the lower and the middle classes of Midnapore which escaped the rampage. Of the men in the upper strata, guardians of suspects were especially selected for

harassment. A few examples will be enough to give an idea of the orgy of destruction and molestation that raged over the area for some time.

Jaminijivan Ghose was one of the leading advocates of Midnapore, respected alike for his status and character. I have already referred to rumours about his son Jyotijivan which must, no doubt, have reached the police. Jyotijivan's younger brother Nirmaljivan was a member of the revolutionary party, though, as I have said, he had little or no direct connexion with the murder of Burge, and the sensational story unrolled by the approver about Nirmal and his friends was patently fictitious. But encouraged by their success in securing capital punishment for Nirmaljivan, the authorities arrested another brother, Navajivan, whom they interned in a village within the jurisdiction of Gopalnagar Police Station. Navajivan too was a member of the party. Possibly because a large number of men had already been prosecuted and punished, Navajivan was not sent up for trial, but he was not destined to come out alive from detention. The police story was that he had committed suicide, but the more likely view is that he was beaten to death. It was not enough that Jaminijivan Ghose had been bereft of two sons; his house was razed to the ground, and he was served with an order to quit Midnapore at twenty-four hours' notice. Similar vandalism was perpetrated by the police when they searched the house of Charuchandra Das whose sole offence was that four of his sons happened to be in jail. He too was ordered to leave within twenty-four hours, and such notices were served on many other notabilities—Ambikaprasanna Sen, the doyen of the Midnapore Bar (uncle of Kshitiprasanna Sen), Jyotish Gupta (elder brother of Dinesh Gupta), Sachin Sen, Satyendranath Sen (father of Amar Sen, a B.V. worker), Manmatha Das, Jatindranath Das, Jahar Adhikari, Chittaranjan Das, Rammohan Sinha, Narayan Mukherji, Natendranath Das and also Pramatha Banerji, the well-known political leader of Contai. Santosh Bera, a young political worker, was beaten to death—not a rare occurrence in those days.

Yet Government lost all the three battles—and also the war at Midnapore. James Peddie's two assailants escaped untouched and so did Prabhanshu Pal who actually killed Robert Douglas. Mrigen and Anath were shot dead but not before they had dis-

posed of B. E. J. Burge. What was more relevant was that the morale of the bureaucracy was broken. It was difficult to find a fourth 'white' Magistrate in the regular cadre of the Indian Civil Service. As a temporary arrangement, P. G. Griffith (later Sir Percival Griffith), Officer on Special Duty at the Secretariat, was sent to succeed Burge. But it was well known that Griffith had expressed his intention to resign from the Indian Civil Service, and so this stopgap appointment did not attract anybody's attention. Soon the Collectorship of Midnapore, held for a short while by M. O. Carter, was Indianized. The Action Squad of the B.V. felt that enough was enough, and turned their attention in other directions.

## From Midnapore to Calcutta

We have to retrace our steps and go back to 1931 to complete an important episode in our narrative.

Of the two young men who killed James Peddie with feline dexterity, Jyotijivan Ghose relapsed into quiet obscurity, but his companion became the object of sudden publicity because of a small boy's exclaiming 'Bimalda!' as the fugitives made their escape. Although both of them had fled together to Calcutta, Bimal stayed on there for a few days just because of the significant clue supplied by the small boy. But when information reached him that his father had not been interrogated and his house had not been searched, he came back to Midnapore along with his eldest brother Bijoy who was a medical student in Calcutta.

Bimal did not then know that the police were looking for him at Midnapore. Yet, as a precautionary measure, he and his brother, who alighted from the same train, did not proceed homewards by the same route. Very soon Bimal realized his mistake but was saved by his father Akshay Dasgupta's ready wit and aplomb. Within a short time of Bimal's arrival, a police Sub-Inspector came to their house and began interrogating Akshaybabu. The visitor somewhat peremptorily asked for his son Bimal to whom he wanted to put a question or two. Akshaybabu immediately called his son Bijoy—I am reproducing Bimal's own version—and said, 'Here is my son Bijoy, a medical student, who has just arrived from Calcutta, because I myself want to know what Bimal is doing.' This plausible reply, uttered without a moment's hesitation, deceived the policeman who thought that his informer, whom he could not bring into the picture at all, must have mistaken one son of

Akshay Dasgupta for another. He just spoke a word or two to Bijoy and left.

The father whose presence of mind had saved Bimal for the time being now sent his second son Binoy to Bhupen Bose, younger brother of Satyen Bose who had embraced martyrdom by shooting down approver Naren Gossain. True to the tradition of his family, Bhupen, popularly known as Ketanbabu, had promised help to the new revolutionary movement in Midnapore. After swift and secret consultations, a Bihari milkman named Raghunandan Gope came from Ketanbabu's house and said to Bimal's father, 'My life upon it, sir! I shall certainly escort your son safely to Calcutta.'

In the evening at about seven, Bimal, his second brother Binoy and Raghu were closeted in Ketanbabu's drawing-room which was adorned with a portrait of martyr Satyen hanging on the wall. In those days it was difficult for any Bengali young man to get down from or enter a train at Midnapore unobserved, because the station was infested with police spies. Undismayed, Raghu said that since the watch was on Bengalis, it would not be difficult for him to go out as a tipsy Hindusthani milkman, and Bimal would accompany him as his son, dressed and turbaned in the appropriate manner. Nobody then would care to scrutinize the ill-dressed, ill-mannered Bihari tippler and his brat. Binoy, Bimal and Ketanbabu readily accepted Raghu's proposal. At 10 p.m. Raghu Gope came out, pretending to be slightly unsteady on account of the alcohol he was supposed to have consumed, and Bimal looked every inch his son with his turban, *kurta* and short *dhoti*. One is reminded of Haridas Datta driving his bullock-cart loaded with pistols and cartridges meant for Rodda & Co. in 1914. When the Calcutta-bound train arrived at Midnapore packed with passengers, policemen and their informers were too busy searching here, there and everywhere to take any notice of the (supposedly) half-drunk milkman and his son who had ensconced themselves in a corner of a crowded third class compartment. In the early hours of the following morning the train arrived at Howrah and Bimal was safely lodged in Rajen Guha's Metiabruz home which had sheltered Binoy Bose. Raghu returned unostentatiously to Midnapore.

From Rajen Guha's house Bimal moved with Praphulla



Datta to Upper Lodna Colliery at Jharia where one of the coal-raising contractors was Praphulla Datta's old friend Krishnakali Bose, and another friend was the Colliery manager himself. All of them were former students of the Engineering College of Benares Hindu University. It was, therefore, possible to put up Bimal with them, and he might have stayed there indefinitely without fear of detection and arrest, but the central leadership in Calcutta decided otherwise for reasons that have to be told in some detail.

The British Government in India was established by force aided by fraud wherever necessary. Bankimchandra Chatterji says pointedly that the Englishmen who controlled the affairs of the East India Company in the early days were exceptionally able and also exceptionally unscrupulous. Nabinchandra Sen suggested in his epic on the Battle of Plassey that the measuring rod of the European merchant was destined to turn into the royal sceptre, the rod of empire. It was largely to protect British commercial interests that the East India Company and, later on, the Queen-Empress took over the administration of the country, and very soon India became the brightest jewel in the British Crown. So when subversive activities began to threaten Imperial domination, the non-official European community took fright because their monopoly would be affected and they goaded the administration to adopt stern measures to root out disaffection that would imperil their vested interests. The European community, which was most powerful in Calcutta, began putting pressure on the Government through its two arms—the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and the European Association, where the merchant *sahibs* had a controlling hand. At the time with which we are concerned here, the organ of the European society was *The Statesman* with which was incorporated *The Friend* (some said *The Fiend*) *of India*. In the twenties *The Statesman* first showed its mailed fist by writing a savage editorial on Balgangadhar Tilak immediately after his death on 1 August 1920, just before the Special Congress Session in which Mahatmajī moved his Non-cooperation resolution. After making a half-hearted apology in 1921 it resumed its vitriolic attacks on Indian nationalism, and the Government hastened to confer a knighthood on Alfred Watson, its editor. The paper became so rabid in its campaign that it went to the

length of demanding action against Satyaranjan Bakshi, the editor of the nationalist daily *Forward*.

## II

The revolutionaries now felt that these pillars of the empire—the non-official European community and their principal propagandist—should be taught a lesson or (better still) be made to shake in their shoes. For maintenance of secrecy revolutionary societies used to work in isolation, but I have felt that there was also some sort of understanding amongst them, because all of them had a common purpose, and they would have made things difficult for themselves if more than one group aimed at the same target. How the top leaders met and chose their separate fields of action, it is difficult to determine because secret societies keep no records. But I have little doubt that there was some plan of concerted activity on parallel lines which never intersected. So we find that in 1931–32, at about the same time, revolutionaries were out to assail Alfred Watson, the editor of *The Statesman*, who was demanding deterrent measures against ‘terrorists’, and also the President of the European Association, who was pressurizing the Government in that direction and inciting the journal to write its vituperative articles. It seems that one particular group, whose identity and leadership have not been discovered yet, chose the editor of *The Statesman* as their target and made two successive attempts on his life and that the B.V. picked on Edward Villiers, the President of the European Association. It is a part of the irony of history that when the revolutionary leaders agreed to dispose of Villiers and Watson, the three Sisters, who according to Greek legends preside over human destiny, conspired to save the victims, for neither was killed and both showed their valour by headlong flight from the reach of the ‘terrorists’!

It was the B.V. that first swung into action and called Bimal away from his relatively safe retreat at Jharia. He was once again put up at Rajen Guha’s house, the hide-out from which some months earlier Binoy Bose had emerged to lead the assault on Writers’ Buildings. The obvious similarity appealed to Bimal who was elated to think that he, like Binoy, would be the hero of two ‘actions’! On 29 October 1931 at 12 noon, he

would enter Gillanders House, the office of Edward Villiers, the President of the European Association, who was also a commercial magnate. This action would be a protest as much against economic exploitation as against the soaring arrogance of the European Association. Early in the morning Bimal was escorted to the Park Street centre where he derived fresh inspiration from an item of news which appeared in the morning paper. He read that District Magistrate Durno of Dacca had been hit by a bullet fired by a revolutionary and sent to hospital. This, Bimal thought, was a happy augury for his own venture.

In the Park Street greenroom, if I may so designate it, he was soon dressed as a Muslim merchant from western India with a shining Turkish cap for his headgear. Binoy Sengupta, who was in charge, had already surveyed Gillanders House and seen how by midday Villiers would be absorbed in office work and almost glued to his chair in his room on the first floor. On this day Binoy Sengupta accompanied Bimal up to the first floor and then, pointing out Villiers' room, quickly came down by the lift. Bimal, or the neo-Muslim-merchant, had no difficulty in entering the room where Villiers was immersed in office papers, and a few assistants, European and Indian, were near about, some seated and some standing. Bimal lost no time, but although unprepared, Villiers lost no time either. As Bimal put his finger to the trigger, the victim ducked under the table and Bimal's shots just hit him in the shoulder. Bimal had calculated that the other persons in the room would take to flight, and they did so as a matter of fact. But he had not reckoned with the desperate courage of a young Englishman who felled him by throwing a chair at him. So he was soon overpowered and handed over to the police who, as was expected, subjected him to prolonged and agonizing torture.

Although Villiers escaped with his life, Bimal's mission had not failed. I speak subject to correction, but I believe Villiers felt that he had had enough of heroic posturings and must now call it a day. So with bandages on, he left India at the earliest opportunity, within a week if I remember aright. It was a nerve-racking experience for the European community as a whole. Hitherto even in remote areas—in tea gardens and jute marts—the lonely Englishman used to look upon himself as the monarch of all he surveyed. Would he do so hereafter?

## III

Bimal's trial was first a tame show and then it degenerated into a farce. The police sent him up for attempted murder but did not press the matter home, because they were busy preparing for the major crime alleged against him—the murder of James Peddie, where they were sure to secure capital punishment for the assailant. The Villiers Tribunal awarded a sentence of ten years' imprisonment which was acceptable to the prosecution. It may be added that Bimal himself made an open admission in court that as an Indian revolutionary he had entered Gillanders House with the purpose of killing Villiers to 'settle accounts with the President of the European Association'.

I shall now proceed to describe what might be called the fiasco of Bimal's trial for the murder of James Peddie, which the prosecution started with great zeal and fanfare. But what actually happened was interesting in its own way—the elaborate preparation, the magnificent start and the sensational collapse. So I make no apology for dilating on the topic here. It was widely circulated—and it was true—that when Bimal and Jyotijivan ran away after killing Peddie, a small boy shouted 'Bimalda!', which was the starting point for the police who thought that a foolproof case could be made out from this clue. The story had spread far and wide, but nobody, not even Bimal, who was running too fast to look behind, knew who this stripling was. The boy's guardians must have taken care to see that he did not give himself away—just to avoid botheration and harassment. For the prosecution another difficulty was that what the boy saw would by itself be insufficient as evidence for murder, as the boy did not see Bimalda shooting anybody or even carrying any arms. For the police, more important than the boy was the testimony which must include more relevant matters that he never saw. So other witnesses must be procured to corroborate him on material points.

The Midnapore police did succeed in securing a boy named Sushil Das, a student of Bimal's school, whom they carefully tutored to say what would bear out the prosecution story, namely that he had seen Bimal Dasgupta shooting the Magistrate. The locality, the place of occurrence, the route allegedly taken by the murderers—all these had to be visited and all other

details checked. Somehow or other during the course of this tutoring, the whole affair leaked out, and the name of the boy was no longer a secret to the B.V. organization at Midnapore. It became known that this tutored witness was the son of a minor official of the Zemindars of Narajol who were pronouncedly nationalist in their political outlook, and Raja Narendralal Khan had even suffered for his revolutionary sympathies. His son Debendralal Khan, then owner of the property, was a staunch patriot and a follower of Subhaschandra Bose. When he heard of the kind of coaching that was being given to this boy, he summoned the father who at first pleaded ignorance of the affair but was cautioned that if his son gave tutored evidence as was being rumoured, the father would immediately be sacked. What effect this warning had become manifest at the trial but not before then.

After the opening address, the Advocate-General first asked P.W. 1 Sushil, who had been presented as an eye-witness of the crime, whether he knew the accused in the dock. Sushil readily identified him, and then by slow stages the witness was being led on to say that on the day of Peddie's murder the assailants pushed him aside and then from close range rained bullets on the Magistrate. Questions and answers took some time longer when, all on a sudden, the Advocate-General asked Sushil whether the person in the dock was one of the assailants, and Sushil blandly said, 'No'. Very much non-plussed, the eminent counsel pointed out that he had already identified the accused. Sushil calmly replied that he had said that he knew the accused very well indeed, but as he had not been asked how and when he knew him, he had not elaborated his answer. In fact he knew Bimalda very well as captain of the football team of the school. As one of the best players Bimal was a familiar figure in the town, loved by all who knew him. The Advocate-General was completely stumped! As the prosecution had only one eye-witness, the case collapsed ignominiously.

#### IV

I have already said that armed revolutionaries look upon the term 'terrorists' as an opprobrium, because this was the epithet used by the authorities then. Once I was myself heckled by mem-

bers of the B.V. at a cultural meeting at the now defunct Netaji Subhaschandra College, because I used the term in the course of a lecture on Saratchandra and *Pather Dabi*. But I still adhere to my view that this word correctly describes their methods, and there is nothing pejorative about it. The British Empire was not 'established by law', as official documents say, but by force of arms. Indian patriots are inclined to lay emphasis on an element of fraud and forgery but that played a negligible part. Siraj-ud-daula might have been young and gullible and Mir Jafar might have been a traitor and some other members of the nobility might have hatched a conspiracy too. But Mir Kasim was alert to the tips of his fingers and he was a relentless enemy of the English. Yet his battles ended as disastrously as the Battle of Plassey. The Maratha wars, the Karnatic wars and the Sikh wars—all bear testimony to the superior might of the British. Britain's Indian empire was founded by force, and it was retained by force, which meant the use of terroristic methods, very often more brutal than those used by guerillas at any time anywhere. It was an unarmed mob on which General Dyer fired relentlessly and he got away with it.

The patriots who believed in overthrowing by violent methods a government established by violence must have their own strategy and their own methods of operation. They met violence by violence, terrorism by terrorism, and there could be nothing wrong if their terrorism, the terrorism of a secret society, differed in operational methods from governmental terrorism. Rather, ethically it was more justifiable because it was used against a foreign usurper bent upon political domination, economic exploitation and cultural enslavement. Accepting this major premiss, I may say that this terrorism had largely succeeded. The attacks made on imperialists—official and non-official—produced an atmosphere of fear and desperation, which showed that the days of British rule in India were numbered. I am quoting below a leaflet published by a Royalist Association and printed from one of the prestigious British printing houses of those days. It must be remembered that this panic-stricken diatribe was circulated within two years of the renewal of violent revolutionary activity in 1930. Here is the fulmination in its entirety:

CONGRESS  
TERRORISM  
MUST BE  
CRUSHED

BENGAL OUTRAGES

LOWMAN SIMPSON MUKHERJEE GARLICK ASHANULLAH

\* \* \* \*

WOUNDED  
HODSON  
NELSON  
CASSELS

DONOVAN SENT HOME FOR  
SAFETY

YESTERDAY DURNO  
THIS MORNING VILLIERS  
WE WANT ACTION

ROYALISTS

(Printed for the Royalists by W. H. Armour,  
Ganges Printing Co. Ltd., Sibpur, Howrah)<sup>17</sup>

This mad outburst calls for a few comments. First, it is not without its comic overtones. Although Mahatmaji insisted on absolute non-violence, John Bull lumped the Mahatma's non-violent civil disobedience with terrorism, which shows that passive resistance was as much an anathema to John Bull as terrorism. That is to say, British Imperialism wanted to stay where it was, undisturbed by any form of disaffection. Secondly, it was not Donovan alone, but a more important person, Sir Charles Tegart, who also had to be sent home and sent home surreptitiously. Last (and first), what action would the Government take against the murderer of Lowman, who had taken his own life, or against the assailants of Durno, Peddie—and later on—Douglas, whom they could not trace?

## Black and Tans in Bengal

Ireland or what Bernard Shaw calls John Bull's other Island has been for many centuries a thorn in the side of John Bull. It was so in the dim past, and it poses an unsolved problem even now when John Bull has been forced to grant independence to all but a small part of it. In the long record of oppression and reprisal when the whole of Ireland was directly under England, an infamous episode was designated as the period of Black and Tan, the name for a species of dogs, ordinarily called the black terrier. When after the First World War the Sinn Fein revolutionaries seemed to be out of control, the authorities tried to suppress them with the help of a specially recruited armed force, so called from the mixture of constabulary and military uniforms (black and *khaki*) worn by them. The Black and Tans were organized in 1921, mostly, it is said, by John Anderson who was then Joint Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Long after, during the Second World War, Anderson held the important position of Home Secretary. I have read somewhere an amusing anecdote that he missed being Prime Minister, partly because Winston Churchill confused him with Harold Macmillan when submitting his list of ministers to the King. But there is a more authentic report that during the war years Churchill sent a confidential recommendation to the King that if anything happened to him, His Majesty should summon either Anthony Eden or John Anderson to head the Cabinet. What impact the resurgence of 'terrorism' in Bengal made on the authorities in England is shown by the appointment of this exceptionally able and ruthless administrator as Governor of Bengal in March 1932.

Pressure must have been put on the British Cabinet also from the European community in India, because already the Central



Government and the Bengal Government had been thinking of amending the existing laws to deal out summary punishment to armed revolutionaries. This is evidenced by the Indian Arms Act XI of 1932 and the Bengal Act XXI of 1932. More stringent powers were assumed by Government, after Sir John's appointment, under the Indian Arms Act VII of 1934. With a vast empire on which the sun never set and the resources for propaganda which such an empire provided, Britain had tried to sell to the world the concept of British justice. Yet this propaganda did not deceive either the Indian intelligentsia or even the Indian masses as it did not deceive George Bernard Shaw, who, of course, was an Irishman. Sir Rashbihari Ghose, one of India's most distinguished jurists, is said to have called the Rowlatt Act a lawless law, and Surendranath Banerjea admitted that the mass upsurge of 1920-21, meaning the Non-cooperation movement, was the immediate effect of this Black Act. The various amendments made to the Arms Act were equally monstrous and more deadly, for the Rowlatt Act only provided for detention without trial, while after the above-mentioned amendments to the Arms Act a man could be sent to the gallows if only he was in possession of firearms although there might be no proof of these arms having been used at all.

Another innovation of this era might be called a Bengali version of the Irish Black and Tans. Sir John Anderson must have realized and so must the police chiefs here that uniformed policemen had become isolated from the people and could not, therefore, track the terrorists until they had committed some overt act of violence, and even then for lack of genuine approvers or spontaneous confessions, the Government could not strike at the roots of the organizations which were spilling over from towns and cities to rural areas and posing a threat to all Europeans, official and non-official. So Government embarked on forming a new force called 'Village Guards' whose professed objective would be to give protection to villagers against anti-social elements. The idea was not altogether new, and at first sight it might sound apolitical. Whenever there was a spurt of crimes which the lonely *chowkidar* (night watchman) or the distant police station could not effectively cope with, villagers would form themselves into 'defence parties' to help prevent crimes or apprehend criminals. The new 'Village Guards'

looked as innocuous as the old 'defence parties', but were very differently constituted and with very sinister aims. Rather than provide protection against anti-socials, they themselves were formed out of the scum of society, and dangling before them was the lure of handsome monetary rewards. One advantage of these officially sponsored organizations was that the rural roughs could move out freely both by day and night. They would not also be asked to offer any explanation if they haunted places where they were not expected or if they intruded on the privacy of a house or a temple or a school. This device was both ingenious and convenient, for revolutionaries generally met in out-of-the-way places and at odd hours of the night. How far Sir John Anderson's new method of grappling with the 'terrorists' succeeded or failed would be seen from what for the sake of brevity I would call the Deobhog misadventure, which ended unhappily for both sides.

## II

As I have already stated, during the late twenties there was a twofold change in the organization of Hemchandra Ghose's party—the Mukti Sangha or B.V. The headquarters were shifted to Calcutta from Dacca for more efficient central direction, and yet, with the passage of time, branches were established in different district towns and also in rural areas—in Midnapore and Tripura, for example, and also in the mofussil, at Brahmanbaria, Joydevpore and Banari, and several other centres. Deobhog, a village in the vicinity of the sub-divisional town of Narayangunge, was one such centre. It was a village with a large percentage of Muslim population and therefore not a likely haunt of revolutionaries who were mostly Hindus. But at Deobhog there was a sprinkling of Hindus, some of them respectable and well-to-do. The great advantage of this retired nook was its proximity to the bustling commercial centre of Narayangunge. It became a suitable rendezvous for revolutionaries who could meet here at short notice, hold secret consultations and then disperse quickly to their different destinations via Narayangunge, which was both a railway station and a steamer terminus.

Although the headquarters of the party had been shifted to

Calcutta, Dacca still remained an important centre of activity. Many of the most dependable soldiers of freedom had come from the rural areas of this district, and almost all the leading figures hailed from the town of Dacca. So Major Satya Gupta quite early saw in the village of Deobhog an excellent outpost for the party. It was a convenient resort for many of the senior leaders and active workers—Kamakshya Roy, Supati Roy and Nikunja Sen, Ramesh Chatterji and Kalipada (alias Malu) Banerji, Santimoy Ganguly and Asit Bhowmick, and also Girija Sen and Amiya Sen, whom I have already mentioned in the course of my narrative of Binoy's flight from Dacca. The house of the Malliks, a moderately prosperous family, provided a hospitable shelter, the lawn of a nearby temple served as a good meeting-place, and young Mati Mallik was a sturdy, dedicated volunteer.

By 1934, when Sir John Anderson was firmly in the saddle, the B.V. leadership had been somewhat depleted, for most of the top men had been arrested and detained—Major Gupta, Bhupen Rakshitroy, all the five members of the Action Squad—and Jyotish Guha was made the new leader of operations, with Sukumar alias Lantu Ghosh and Madhu Banerji as his principal aides. On one occasion to be presently described, the plans and programmes of these men brought them into collision with what we might call the Anderson 'Village Guards'. The party leadership were feeling that after disposing of three European Magistrates in succession they must cry a halt to their activities at Midnapore and look for other fields of action. Naturally their attention was attracted to Dacca, the original base, which even now could supply a number of sturdy recruits ready to undertake daring adventures. With a view to exploring new possibilities in this old field, Jyotish Guha's two deputies—Madhu Banerji and Sukumar Ghose—took up residence under assumed names in a small hotel at Narayangunge, where they shared a room with two other persons, both of whom were employed in a Jute Mill and both were drunkards. One advantage of chumming with these toppers was that noticing the erratic movements of their room-mates who seemed to have no regular occupation, the drunkards thought Sukumar and Madhu to be police spies! So the revolutionaries had no fear that these men would be unduly inquisitive about their activities.

Sukumar and Madhu had stationed themselves at Narayangunge for the time being to revitalize the centres in the district of Dacca—at Banari, Joydevpore and other places, and also to draw up plans of future action. Mati Mallik's house was a convenient rendezvous for these purposes. Mati was a staunch worker of the party and his parents and brothers were warm sympathizers. His house was also a safe place for custody of firearms, and a sheltered spot near the temple was a convenient place for their nocturnal deliberations in which members from Dacca and Narayangunge could easily take part. One of their problems was how to tackle the new nuisance of 'Village Guards', of whom they had received information from their own intelligence agencies. Ironically enough, they did not know that a regular branch of this organization had been started at Deobhog and that it had not failed to notice the stealthy arrivals and departures of strangers and their meetings near the temple at night. These 'Guards' knew Mati Mallik, an inhabitant of the locality, but no one else among the flitting visitors. So unknown to each other, the two hostile forces were heading for a collision, and it occurred—somewhat unexpectedly for the revolutionaries—on 10 April 1934.

Walking in single file, Mati, Sukumar and Madhu were returning from their meeting late at night along a narrow village road running on one side of a shallow canal, which in the month of April was almost dry. Suddenly, in the darkness, three men swooped upon them, the first on Mati who was some yards ahead of his friends, and the other two, severally, on Sukumar and Madhu who were separated from each other by a few steps. Sukumar, who was not a strong man, was trying hard to extricate himself from his assailant who had held him firmly when suddenly he heard the sound of gunshots and felt a bullet whizzing past his forehead.

In the darkness of night Sukumar had two sensations, first that drops of blood were oozing from his forehead, and secondly, that his assailant's grasp was relaxed and limp, and in a minute or so the hefty figure fell down on the ground. The fact was that Madhu, a stout athlete, had without much difficulty released himself from his captor and promptly fired on both the adversaries—his as well as Sukumar's. The latter who died on the spot was none other than Ramzan Ali, the leader of the

local village guards, who with a party of four or five had way-laid these 'terrorists'. Madhu's adversary was severely injured, but not killed.

Neither Madhu nor Sukumar knew what had happened to Mati, but they felt that since Mati was many yards ahead of them, he must have escaped the attention of the village guards. It was not so in fact. Mati was caught by one of these guards, and captor and captive, locked in a deadly embrace, had rolled down into the canal which was like a muddy ditch. There a few other 'guards' joined the fray and succeeded in apprehending Mati who was handed over to the police with a revolver in his possession.

With a bleeding forehead Sukumar had quickly to seek shelter which he found in the house of Mrs Kananbala Mukherji, elder sister of Kalipada alias Malu Banerji, a senior B.V. leader. After a night's rest and some treatment of his injury he was fully refreshed, and then he came out to enquire about Mati and Madhu. Madhu in his turn was somewhat worried when, on returning to the hotel, he found that Sukumar was not there. Did Sukumar die from the bullets he himself had fired? Next morning he learnt from the house of Mrs Mukherji that Sukumar was safe. He then came to Kalachand Saha, an active supporter, who had donated a large part of the jewellery of his family to replenish the party's funds. Here Madhu's first duty was to deposit his revolver with Kalachand, for he knew that the police would soon be on the lookout not only for Ramzan Ali's killer but also for the weapon from which the bullet had been fired. He also gathered that Mati had been captured and handed over to the police. Being sure that Sukumar must be making his own arrangements for flight, he felt that he should leave the area immediately and so retraced his steps to their chummery—the hotel.

Here Madhu found himself in the midst of a tense drama which had an ominous prelude but a heroic end. Their room-mates, the two toppers, both of them employees in one of the David Jute Mills of Narayangunge, had in the morning suddenly come across a cartridge. The man who picked it up found here an opening to a handsome monetary reward. It must have been, he thought, dropped by their new acquaintances. If they were spies, they would be chastised by the police who would

also reward the informer. If they were revolutionaries, the police would look upon the clue as a godsend, and the amount of reward would be very handsome indeed. The other toper, whom for the sake of convenience we shall call No. 2, strongly objected to this scheme of betrayal. But the lure of gold was too strong for No. 1 who, despite his chum's objection, would not desist from his scheme. Only instead of going straight to the police, he first met his office boss, the head clerk, who, on seeing the cartridge, sharply reprimanded him saying that he did not know that he was playing with fire, and without further argument, cut short the nefarious plan by throwing the cartridge into the river Sital-Lakshya.

But our friend, toper No. 1, was not to be dissuaded even now. The cartridge might not be there, but he had heard of the shooting and also seen a government proclamation promising a reward of a thousand rupees for information leading to the apprehension of the assassin. So he at once decided on going to the police station to give information and to collect his reward. Luckily Madhu returned to the hotel just after toper No. 1 had left. Toper No. 2, who was in the room, took Madhu aside and told him of the impending danger. As his friend might have gone straight to the police station, Madhu must flee the place immediately. He said that though a most unworthy person himself, he did not want to add to his iniquities; rather he would try to wash out his sins by one act of piety. He then virtually forced Madhu out of the building, and hailing a taxi, put the fleeing revolutionary inside it and handed him all the cash he had with him at the moment. When the police would come to the hotel, Madhu would be far, far away! Truly has Shakespeare said, 'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together'.

Madhu escaped, but not his junior comrade Mati Mallik who had already been seized; nor yet his friend Kalachand Saha with whom he had deposited his revolver. Acting on information received from sources not possible to trace now, a police officer came to Kalachand's house, and as Kalachand came down, he arrested him at once. At first Kalachand did not think of offering any resistance, feeling it would be futile; but as he suddenly remembered Madhu's revolver, he pushed his captor down and rushed upstairs. Seizing the revolver, he ran to the roof of the third storey and threw it into the Sital-Lakshya

river from which there was little chance of its being recovered. All this was done by Kalachand in less time than I am taking to report his action. He now returned and surrendered himself to the waiting police official and his constables who securely handcuffed him before taking him to the police station.

All the atrocities committed by the police on Kalachand and Mati proved futile, for neither of them would speak a word, and no information was available about the identity of the two men who were in Mati's company. Neither could the police connect Mati and Kalachand, and it was not, therefore, possible to frame any charge against the latter. All the wrath of the police was now poured on Mati who had been caught with a revolver in his possession and could, therefore, be prosecuted before a Special Tribunal. A case was made out against him under the Indian Arms Act which was amended by Sec. 3 of the Bengal Act XXI of 1932, the Arms Act XI of 1932 and Sec. 20A of the Arms Act VII of 1934. These were to be read with Sec. 34 and Sec. 120B of the I.P.C., and most importantly, Sec. 302, which, as we all know, lays down the law of culpable homicide amounting to murder. All this battery of guns was trained on a teenager who was arrested with a revolver which he had made no attempt to use. For such an offence a few years' rigorous imprisonment would be adequate punishment. But here the Special Tribunal pronounced capital sentence, and when the case came up for confirmation before the High Court, the Deputy Legal Remembrancer put forward the amazing argument that Sec. 20A of the Arms Act attracted the death penalty when a person possessing firearms embarked upon a murderous adventure, though Mati was so far away from the place where the killing took place that any attempt to connect him with the murder must be far-fetched, especially because the revolver used could not be produced and the assassin could not even be named. Yet in the High Court their Lordships upheld the death sentence on the ground of what they called 'constructive murder'! Kalicharan Ghose, the indefatigable historian, describes the execution of Mati Mallik as a 'mockery of law'.<sup>18</sup> I would say that here we find the Anderson epoch in its true colours.

## III

Very soon Sir John Anderson had a direct and vivid experience of the futility of the regime he had been trying to instal. Far from weeding out the 'terrorists', the 'Village Guards' and the Intelligence agencies were totally in the dark about the activities of patriotic young men in lower Bengal who, in less than a month after the Dcobhog incident, proceeded to a Himalayan hill station to pounce upon the Governor himself. Sir John Anderson escaped, partly by luck and partly by sheltering himself behind a woman. But he could not have failed to notice that the enemy could easily pierce through his elaborate defences, and if he himself escaped, he did so with the skin of his 'lips'!

Early in 1934 Jyotish Guha had held consultations with his two lieutenants—Sukumar Ghose and Madhu Banerji—about how to assail Sir John Anderson. Jyotish had been put in overall charge of operations in the absence of the members of the Action Squad, because he was intrepid and inventive and also possessed a remarkable capacity for deceiving the police. He had been arrested in 1931 but was let off after a few months because the police thought that he was innocent and had been taken into custody by mistake. The police were led to think so—at least once again! From his own observation and from reliable supporters planted within the official world, Jyotish came to the conclusion that Anderson could be most conveniently attacked at Darjeeling where the Governor moved about somewhat freely; and as official protocol was not very strictly observed there, it would not be difficult for outsiders to come close to His Excellency in a crowded meeting-place. So, first of all, the team of assailants had to be chosen and adequately trained and equipped. Kamakshya Roy, a leading member, had earlier established a strong centre at Joydevpore near Dacca, and after Kamakshya Roy's incarceration, the charge had passed on to Sukumar Ghose, a Dacca man like Kamakshya, who suggested the names of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Rabindra Banerji of Joydevpore as reliable, courageous and trained volunteers who would be able to accomplish the deed. Kamakshya Roy, who was home-interned at the time, might also have been consulted. Bhabani and Rabi would be assisted by two other volunteers—



Madhu Banerji's younger brother Manoranjan who, it will be recalled, had boarded with me for a few days three years earlier, and Ujjala, daughter of Suresh Majumdar, a veteran of the party.

The plan was that Bhabani and Rabi would proceed straight from Joydevpore to Darjeeling and stay at Lewis Jubilee Sanatorium, but they would not carry any weapons, for this sanatorium was a popular summer resort of Bengalis and it might also be the haunt of police informers. Manoranjan of Banari and Ujjala Majumdar would go to Darjeeling via Calcutta posing as a fashionable young man and his gay, bespectacled girl-friend out on a pleasure trip. Ujjala would take with her a harmonium inside which would be concealed a pair of revolvers. As befitted such fashionable young people, Manoranjan and Ujjala would stay at the more exclusive Snowview Hotel. Jyotish Guha had booked accommodation at both these places for his two sets of volunteers, and he had asked Sukumar and Madhu to communicate these details to the four 'activists'. It was at this time that the Deobhog incident occurred. However, as neither Madhu nor Sukumar had been arrested, and as even their identity had not been revealed, there was no interference with their programme, and preparations for the Darjeeling venture went on uninterrupted.

Bhabani and Rabi from Joydevpore and Manoranjan and Ujjala from Calcutta reached Darjeeling on the appointed day, but by different routes. Ujjala was fashionably dressed in a blue sari, and whenever she appeared in public, she wore dark sunglasses to reinforce the impression of a flighty young woman.

As Bhabani and Rabi alighted at the Darjeeling station, they saw an impressive array of policemen and soldiers all around, and so they decided that they should enter the Sanatorium separately, though this precaution was unnecessary for nobody took any notice of them. In the evening, they strolled over to the Mall where by previous arrangement they met Manoranjan and Ujjala. Manoranjan said that on 6 May there was a flower show at which the Governor would be present. Bhabani and Rabi should buy tickets for the show and saunter around as though admiring the flowers, but really observing the security arrangements, and they must also try to get a clear view of the Governor himself so that there might not be any mistake on the

crucial day. On 6 May Manoranjan and Ujjala would not stir out of their hotel at all. The programme was adhered to, but on account of the large number of visitors at the flower show and the crowd of policemen, Bhabani and Rabi could not come near enough to the Governor to get a good look at him.

When on returning from the show they gave an account of this disappointing experience to Manoranjan and Ujjala at the Snowview Hotel, the former reassured them that everything would be all right on the fateful day of the Lebong races on 8 May. It was arranged that on 7 May Bhabani and Rabi would keep indoors all day while Manoranjan and Ujjala would do the reconnoitring. At the race-course Manoranjan gathered valuable information not only about where His Excellency would be seated to watch the race but also about where he would stand to award the Cup to the winner. Manoranjan found, too, that some rows of seats for spectators were near the Governor's box, and so if Bhabani and Rabi could station themselves in these rows and sidle up towards the Governor when he would stand up to present the Cup, he would be an easy target. On 8 May Manoranjan and Ujjala accompanied Bhabani and Rabi up to the gate of the race-course and bade them goodbye as the two friends bought their tickets and went inside to take their seats. Manoranjan and Ujjala immediately left in a taxi for Siliguri to take the train to Calcutta to avoid possible arrest.

As the race began, Bhabani and Rabi, who had taken their seats at the right places, quietly moved inch by inch towards the Governor from two sides. When at the conclusion of the race His Excellency stood up from his seat to present the Cup and the assembled crowd was pressing towards him, Bhabani came within a distance of about eight to nine feet, separated from his target by a low concrete wall on which he rested his elbow to steady his aim and then fired twice. As the second bullet left the the revolver, Bhabani felt an enormously heavy body pressing upon him, and unable to maintain his balance at what seemed like an unexpected landslide, he fell down with a crash. In actual fact, Raja Udaynarayan Singh, the bulky ruler of Bharatgarh State, had fallen upon him! There were some seats reserved for rulers of native states on a raised ground just above the spot where Bhabani was standing. It is very difficult to determine what actually happened. The Raja might have jumped upon

the assailant trying to protect the Governor. Or, what seems to be more likely, the Raja was so perplexed by this overwhelming experience that he fell from his seat above on Bhabani before he had fully grasped the situation. As Bhabani lay prostrate, he was seriously injured by four bullets shot by security guards. Meanwhile Rabi was not sitting idle. As soon as he saw Bhabani taking aim, he jumped over the low wall and fired on the Governor who attempted to take shelter behind his lady stenographer. It was later discovered that one bullet had just grazed past His Excellency's face singeing his lips, and some say another had struck the stenographer's leg. Other bullets hit sergeants and security guards, but Sir John Anderson's life was saved. I need not harp on the battery of oppression to which Bhabani and Rabi were subjected. When Bhabani, who was severely mauled, was asked for his dying declaration, he simply parried the suggestion with a counter-question, 'Is he still alive?'

Neither did Manoranjan and Ujjala escape the attention of the police who had been galvanized into hectic activity. At Siliguri information had been received that a young man and a fair-complexioned girl wearing a pink sari and with high-powered glasses, both of them 'terrorists', had decamped from Darjeeling and might be at Siliguri on their way to Calcutta. But Ujjala had taken the precaution of removing her glasses and in the train she had changed to a white sari. So they bluffed their pursuers and reached Calcutta safely. But arrested they were—Ujjala after about ten days in Calcutta. She was sent to Kurseong for an identification parade at the Maharani Girls' High School. She was placed in a row of girl students of the school, but before the police and their witnesses arrived, the Headmistress had whispered to her that she must take off her spectacles if she were to escape detection. The parade, however, was only a farce, for it was known that the identifying witnesses had been made to see the prisoner even before she had come to Darjeeling. I mention this incident only to record the solicitude of the Headmistress; it is these little touches of natural piety or patriotism which sweeten the perilous life of revolutionaries. Ujjala was duly identified by a score of witnesses before a magistrate who had been deputed to supervise the ritual.

The police who were now very active arrested, besides these four, a large number of young men—Jyotish Guha, Asok Sen, Nirmal Bose, Sachin Bhowmick, Sunil Sen Gupta, Samar Guha, Sailen Neogi, Taranath Desarkar, Parimal Bose, Khagen Basu-mallik, Bijoy Sengupta, Amal Nandi, Sudhis Guha, Dhruba Roy, Prabodh Roy, Ramendra Roy, Indu Sarkar, Amar Sen, Ramesh Chatterji, and Sunil Sen. Sunil Sen's primary offence was that he was a class-mate and erstwhile friend of Binoy Bose. What was funny was that in their mad hunt for the culprit of a conspiracy of which they could unearth very little by their own efforts, they arrested as many as eleven men bearing the name of 'Sunil Sen'. Another proof of the ignorance of the sapient police chiefs was that although they had arrested the leader, Jyotish Guha, who had masterminded the assault, they did not send him up for trial at all. The Special Tribunal that tried the Lebong case had before them seven accused; besides Bhabani, Rabi, Manoranjan and Ujjala there were Sukumar Ghose, Madhu Banerji, elder brother of Manoranjan, and Sushil Chakraborti. But the prosecution had utterly failed to probe the secrets of the revolutionary party, as, if my information is correct, Sir John Anderson himself noted with bitterness. Badal Gupta was a student of Nikunja Sen at Banari High School, and so were Madhu and Manoranjan. From Manoranjan to his elder brother Madhu it was but one step, and it is in this way that Sushil Chakraborti, another student of Nikunja Sen at Banari School, was roped in. The only originality displayed by the prosecution was in pinning down Sukumar Ghose as leader, but there also the public prosecutor's rhetoric sounded hollow to knowledgeable people when they found that no charge had been framed against Jyotish Guha, the kingpin of the whole affair.

Under the new amended law, carrying arms was an offence liable to capital punishment. So Bhabani and Rabi were sentenced to death on two separate counts—attempted murder and carrying arms, both the sentences to run concurrently, and Manoranjan got capital sentence only for carrying arms. Madhu and Sukumar and Ujjala and Sushil were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The death sentence of Rabi and Manoranjan was later commuted to transportation for life, and Bhabani was hanged—but only once! Sir John Anderson con-

tinued to rule Bengal for two years more, and ended a successful administrative career with a seat in the House of Lords as Viscount Waverley. But did he have any idea that within ten years of his departure from Bengal, the British empire in India would dissolve,

And like [an] insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind,

and who knows, in the shades, Bhabani might draw His Excellency's attention to the prestigious Anderson House in Calcutta, which has now been renamed BHABANI BHAVAN?



## PART TWO

# Mahatmaji and Netaji

. . . Only a few miles from us, to speak by the proportion of the universe, while I was droning over my lessons, Yoshida was goading himself to be wakeful with the stings of the mosquito; and while you were grudging a penny income tax, Kusakabé was stepping to death with a noble sentence on his lips.

—R. L. Stevenson





## Mahatmaji

After the attempt on Sir John Anderson in 1934, there was outwardly a respite in the activities of the B.V., and that for various reasons. Generally, after every overt action there is a lull, because time is required for preparation for a new venture, and a quiet spell is helpful also in disarming the suspicions of the police who, after every Special Tribunal judgment, would be led to believe that the movement had been scotched if not killed. Secondly, most of the important leaders were now in jail, and if a new programme of action was to be launched, the old cadre had to be rebuilt. To my mind there was a more pressing reason of which all the party workers might not have been aware. Subhaschandra Bose had now become the fountainhead of inspiration, and in about five years Subhaschandra's mind would be busy evolving a new strategy. He had a keener perception of the international situation than our much-advertised experts on external affairs, and his visit to Europe in the early thirties convinced him that a second World War was in the offing and that India must take advantage of Britain's involvement in it to secure her own independence. He had gradually come to lose faith in Gandhiji's leadership; so he not only wanted to capture the Congress but also to secure external assistance. Anticipating future events, I might even say here in the exordium that he was right in both his calculations. In 1933, in London, the citadel of British imperialism, he had voiced a loud protest against 'our leader's', i.e. Gandhiji's, 'total surrender' to the British Government, by which he referred to the Mahatma's announcement of his withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience movement at about this time.<sup>19</sup>

As a politician dedicated wholeheartedly to the cause of Indian freedom, Subhaschandra was right to resent the action

of a leader who let his followers down so that he might concentrate his attention on his work for the uplift of Harijans. Yet the criticism was unfair. Mahatmaji was the greatest figure in the political life of India, but he was not a politician at all. Was he a saint? That also would not be a correct description, for no saint would, like him, take an active role in the daily life of his nation in all spheres—political, economic, social, and educational. Indeed, it is only towards the end of his life when his immediate followers seemed to be getting a little restive in the shadow of his dominating personality that he began to develop the aloofness of a saint, far from the madding crowd's not very noble scrambling for power. Should we then use his own words and call him a man who made experiments with truth? That also would be a misleading approach. He was, by and large, lacking in intellectual curiosity, and although he started as a co-operator and ended up as an exponent of non-cooperation, it was not because a new truth had swum into his ken but because he wanted to live anew his old faith in *ahimsa*. He had a baffling personality, but he had the usual human attributes; there was a centre from which all his activities radiated. The focal point in his character was moral passion, a salamander-like conscience which grew stronger from perpetual burning. This moral passion was a passion for justice, and only indirectly a passion for truth. The difference between him and other men is noticeable in his attitude to every problem he faced. Modern Indian history tells us of many great fighters for freedom, and of them the two greatest were Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Subhaschandra Bose. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Subhaschandra felt that this was the opportunity for India to exploit Britain's involvement in a critical situation and wrest freedom from a country that had been exploiting us for about two hundred years. Mahatmaji's first reaction was that India must not embarrass Britain when she was in a sore plight, and he served the Quit India notice only when all other avenues of negotiation had been exhausted; and at that time, consciously or unconsciously, he was drawn to Subhaschandra's way of thinking.

## II

Gandhiji experienced his first adventure in what he later called Satyagraha soon after he arrived in South Africa where he had gone on professional duty. That was in 1893. At Maritzburg he was asked to leave a first-class compartment as soon as a white passenger entered. When he refused to comply on the ground that he held a first-class ticket, he was forcibly ejected, but he stuck to his point and shivered in the cold on the platform rather than travel by the 'van compartment' set apart for 'coloured' passengers or 'coolies', as they were called by white men in South Africa. Here in this intransigence we have the first stirrings of the movement that would about sixty years later put an end to an empire upon which, at the time of this incident, the sun did not set. Gandhiji stood up for justice as a passenger who had a first-class ticket; he also felt aggrieved at the unfair distinction drawn between one man and another on the basis of colour, and he was repelled by the violence used by his aggressors.<sup>20</sup>

He had gone to South Africa, expecting that he would have to stay there for a year, but he was not able to come back until more than twenty years later, in 1915. By then he was a celebrity on account of his largely successful campaign against the 'colour' bar or racial discrimination. It is not merely the tangible result achieved but also the method applied which was remarkable. He called it passive resistance or Satyagraha, which means that he would use no violence, but passively, patiently and firmly resist what was unjust. His unwavering attachment to truth and justice and his unfaltering confidence in the rightness of his cause were connected with two basic traits of his character which had a tremendous effect on public affairs—his candour and his courage. He would always call a spade a spade, and no amount of external pressure would deflect him from his chosen path. When, however, he thought that there was some error somewhere—it might be an illusion—he would have no hesitation in calling off his own movement. But equally fearlessly he would expose the putrid squalor he saw in the enemy's camp. Subhaschandra regretted that in 1933 the leader had surrendered to the enemy, but what Subhaschandra forgot was that three years earlier Gandhiji had launched the campaign

with an open, unqualified announcement to the Viceroy—and his thin, frail voice had reverberated throughout the world—that the British rule in India was a ‘curse’ which must be mended or ended. Slightly modifying Gilbert Murray’s description,<sup>21</sup> one might say that the British Government did not know how to deal with a man who cared nothing for the cajolery and threats of his enemy but was simply determined to say and do what he thought to be right and what the enemy also knew to be true; and we may add that here was a man whose message would travel from door to door, from village to village, from town to town and from province to province.

I recall vividly that in 1915—the year when Gandhi came back to India—none would dare utter the phrase ‘Bande Mataram’ in the open, that when occasionally we discovered a ‘Bande Mataram’ poster, denouncing British rule, pasted by night on the walls of schools or any other public building, our elders looked scared as if they had discovered a time bomb, but after the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1920, ‘Bande Mataram’ was on everybody’s lips and nobody felt any fear or scruple in calling the British Government ‘satanic’. It seemed as if a tidal bore had swept the entire land-mass from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas and a new India had come into being. When one looks at the freedom struggle from this point of view, one might say that the work of earlier revolutionaries, from Wasudeo Phadke to Jatin Mukherji, was fulfilled in the movement launched by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, though they were armed ‘terrorists’ and Mahatmaji was a non-violent passive resister.

As we review Gandhi’s eventful life and its varied impact, we are often taken aback by the unexpected but inspiring spectacle of might quailing before right. In dealing with him, the British Government used all the devices of the lion and the fox, but Gandhiji had no weapon except his moral conviction which the lion ignored and the fox shunned. All his cards were laid open before his opponents, and whenever he started a movement, the opposite party would get a clear notice from him. Yet his actions often produced strange effects which none could foresee. Winston Churchill shuddered at the idea of this seditious Fakir striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy’s palace to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-

Emperor. But Churchill lived to shake hands and parley on equal terms with this Fakir's successor when they were Prime Ministers of two states of the same Commonwealth. This was something spectacular, and Churchill's petulant abuse is now quoted as one of the handsomest tributes ever paid to the Mahatma. And what is more important is that although by no means a 'terrorist', Gandhi struck terror in the hearts of the rulers who tried to suppress him. He was first arrested in 1922 and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. 'A convict and a criminal in the eye of the law', wrote Sarojini Naidu, 'nevertheless the entire Court rose in an act of spontaneous homage when Mahatma Gandhi entered—a frail, serene, indomitable figure in a coarse and scanty loin cloth', and the judge concluded his judgment with an apology in which he wished away the sentence he himself was awarding. And he was right. The incarceration created such a stir in India and abroad that the Government set the convict free before the expiry of two years, the nominal excuse being an operation for appendicitis which had been successfully performed while he was still in custody.

In 1930 Gandhiji started the Civil Disobedience movement and Government tried to suppress it with a heavy hand. But the great problem was the problem of dealing with the author of the movement. He made no secret of his seditious purpose which he elaborated in successive letters to the Viceroy, but the Viceroy did nothing to hinder him. He made a long march from Sabarmati to Dandi where on 5 April 1930 he broke the Salt Law, but Government did not arrest him until 4 May when the whole country was astir with rebellion. Government dangled before the country the counter-attraction of the Round Table Conference, but without Gandhiji or his nominee it was a flop. So the Viceroy had to set the seditious Fakir free and persuade him to attend a second Round Table Conference, which was convened specially for this purpose, although it was also a significant move in the fraudulent game which the British Government would play till the last moment. Gandhi returned from the Round Table Conference a disappointed man, but what no one realized at that time was that the process of liquidation of the Empire had begun. The British Government advanced a step further only to retreat again. Gandhiji was put into prison, and Ramsay MacDonald—who, according

to Bernard Shaw, should by then have been made Viscount Lossiemouth—announced his infamous Communal Award, injecting an additional dose of separate electorates. As a mark of protest against the vivisection of the Hindu community, Gandhiji undertook a fast unto death on 20 September 1932, and the new proposal about separate electorates had to be given a decent burial. Some months later, in May 1933, Gandhiji went on a fast for 21 days for a kind of self-purification because he wanted to prepare himself for the cause of Harijans, but the Government released him at once, for the 'frail, thin' prisoner might die and Government was not prepared to face the consequences. This release is not a major incident in Gandhiji's life, but it shows how the apostle of non-violence had succeeded in infusing terror into the hearts of those who took pride in the possession and use of violent weapons.

Gandhiji's final direct confrontation with the British Government in India is illuminating in more ways than one. As soon as the Congress passed the Quit India resolution on 8 August 1942, the members of the Congress Working Committee and many other important leaders were taken into custody. Winston Churchill was then Prime Minister, L. S. Amery, a die-hard Conservative, was the Secretary of State for India and Lord Linlithgow, a heavy-bodied, unimaginative and insensitive sort of man, was the Viceroy. It is difficult to conceive of a more disagreeable triumvirate. Yet even under such a trio the half-clad Fakir, who himself loved to live in a Bhangi (sweepers') colony, was accommodated in the Aga Khan's Palace in Bombay, and he was allowed to have as his companions his wife Kasturba, Sarojini Naidu, his secretary Mahadev Desai, and Dr Sushila Nayar, who possibly joined them later. All these precautions and arrangements were a confession of defeat, which was to be more luridly underlined a few months later. The Government's answer to the Quit India resolution provoked spontaneous disturbances all over the country, and although it might sound fantastic, it was quite in keeping with the moves of Lord Linlithgow's Government to issue a White Paper making Gandhi and the Congress responsible for these violent incidents. The result was that in protest Mahatmaji went on a twenty-one-day fast which attracted worldwide publicity, and although Government turned a deaf ear to the

proposal for his release, they made elaborate arrangements for Gandhiji's treatment and issued daily bulletins signed by six doctors, official and non-official, one of the latter being Dr Bidhan Roy, then India's foremost physician and a prominent Congressman. When Lord Linlithgow was told about his resolve to go on fast, the Viceroy remarked with characteristic vulgarity, 'A very convenient way of getting out'. Yet it was not with Churchill, Amery and Linlithgow but with Gandhi and his followers that the future lay. Gandhi was unconditionally released a few months after Lord Linlithgow's departure from India in 1943, and within three years, on 15 March 1946, a new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, made a firm announcement that the British would 'quit India', thus bowing to the ultimatum Gandhiji had flung at them about four years earlier.

When after a lapse of many years we look back at the events of a quarter of a century from 1920-21 to 1945-46, the conclusion becomes irresistible that the more the British wanted to outmanoeuvre Mahatmaji, the more they outmanoeuvred themselves, that their sole satisfaction was to divide the country they could no longer exploit, and that although Mahatmaji was at times humiliated and baffled, every temporary discomfiture was a milestone in the path leading to ultimate victory. When the Government of Lord Linlithgow blamed the 1942 disturbances on Mahatmaji and the Congress, and Mahatmaji protested, both were equally right and equally wrong. By then the disaffection against British tyranny and trickery had become so deep-seated and so widespread—thanks largely to Mahatma Gandhi—that the slightest spark was enough to set the country ablaze. Or, I might quote A. H. Clough and say:

And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light,  
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,  
But westward, look, the land is bright.

### III

Mahatma Gandhi was in the van of the revolutionary movement that brought political emancipation, but it has to be remembered that basically he was neither a politician nor a

revolutionary, but a moralist and a man of religion. When he came back to India after a long sojourn in a foreign land where he had led a struggle and established a farm, he had become obsessed by two ideas which became his mission for the rest of his life. He had come to believe in non-violence, which had been preached by the Lord Buddha 2500 years ago, but his attitude was different from the Buddha's. The Buddha sought in *ahimsa* a key to the attainment of personal salvation, but there is no evidence that he sought in it a solution to political, economic or administrative problems. Emperor Asoka became a convert to Buddhism which he helped to spread far and wide, but it seems that he also kept his powder dry. Otherwise the political disintegration that set in after Asoka's death would have occurred during his lifetime. Some people say that Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest Indian born after Buddha, and the claim is not without justification, for it is he who made *ahimsa* a political principle, which he applied to all spheres of life and with which he confronted an antagonist who was violent, ruthless and crafty.

There is, however, a basic contradiction in the use of *ahimsa* in freedom struggles. It must choose the path of negotiation, and negotiation, which means give and take, must end up with compromise. This limitation in the leader's creed dogged the Indian freedom movement right from the beginning, and if India won freedom under Mahatmaji, she had to pay a heavy penalty for which the Father of the Nation must bear the ultimate responsibility. When Gandhiji arrived on the Indian political scene, he had already made experiments in Satyagraha and passive resistance and was now eager to apply his principle of non-violence or *ahimsa* in a larger sphere. And the opportunity came to him within a few years, but in a bizarre way. He had realized early enough in South Africa that there was no genuine friendship between the Hindus and the Muslims, and he was convinced that it would be on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that his faith in *ahimsa* would be put to its severest test, for the question presented the widest field for such an experiment.<sup>22</sup>

The First World War had ended in November 1918, and Indian Muslims were agitated over the imminent dismemberment of the Caliph's territories as part of the Peace Treaty pro-



posed by the Allies. The Hindus, by which term we should understand non-Muslims, had a sore grievance too. In 1919 Government passed an anti-sedition act, popularly known as the Rowlatt Act, which gave wide powers to the executive to suppress revolutionary activities. There were loud protests which Government wanted to silence with a heavy hand. Governmental repression reached its climax in the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre of 13 April 1919, which has become a landmark in the history of our freedom movement. The revolutionaries and the victims at Jallianwalla Bagh were mostly Hindus, and so at this time the two communities—Muslims (70 millions) and non-Muslims (230 millions), according to Gandhiji—had a common platform and a stimulus for joint action. Gandhiji had hesitations about combining these two causes, because, according to him, the Punjab wrongs were a local affair but the Khilafat question had much wider implications. The champions of the Khilafat called it a ‘trans-Himalayan’ question; all the more reason that Gandhiji should have thought twice before involving cis-Himalayan non-Muslims in it.

From that time on Gandhiji took a leading part in the Khilafat agitation and made the alleged Khilafat wrongs the basis of his Non-cooperation movement. Leaving the moral overtones aside, it seems that the coupling of the Khilafat wrongs and the struggle for Swaraj was a bargain struck by the two agitating communities; at least that is the way in which Mahatmaji’s attitude was interpreted by his friends and his foes, the British Government as also the Hindus and the Muslims of India. Since Mahatmaji himself felt that the demands made by the Muslims of India about the Khilafat were just and fair and in accordance with his ‘ethical principles’, he had every right to fight for them. In his *Experiments with Truth*, he says, ‘Friends and critics have criticized my attitude to the Khilafat question. . . . I feel that I have no reason to revise it. . . .’<sup>23</sup> But he also admits that ‘it was not for [him] to enter into the absolute merits of the question, provided there was nothing immoral in their demands’. This is somewhat puzzling, for how could he call the demands ‘just and fair’ without entering into the merits or absolute merits of the question?

Gandhiji was no scholar, neither am I. But before involving twenty-three crores of non-Muslims in an agitation that did not

concern them at all, he owed it to them and to himself to explain how he arrived at his conclusion. If his argument was based on Lloyd George's perfidy, righting that wrong might be a legitimate ground for agitation and also for asking twenty-three crores of non-Muslims to lend their support to their Muslim brethren, but even then the quantum and nature of such support had to be carefully weighed. But how would he connect Khilafat with the Amritsar massacres which arose directly out of the struggle for Indian political independence, in which Muslims *qua* Muslims might not be interested at all? Supposing the British restored the Caliphate—if such restoration was within their power, Indian Muslims would then have no just and legitimate basis of their own for participating in the freedom movement, and it would, on this hypothesis, be sheer ingratitude to the British to do so. Would Mahatmaji then carry on a struggle against his Muslim brethren? The absurdity of these speculations only shows that Mahatmaji had no 'just and legitimate basis' for linking the struggle for Swaraj to the struggle for the restoration of the Caliphate. Neither had he any clear perception of the Khilafat question. Lloyd George was not known to be a very scrupulous man. The fact also remains that the Muslims, although they gladly accepted Gandhiji's support, did not ask for it and would have fought their religious battle in their own way. In defence of Lloyd George, it might be said that although he was never a stickler for moral principles in politics, he was exceptionally clear-sighted and understood the complexities of this problem much better than his critics. One of the reasons why he did not redeem his pledge was that he knew that the Caliphate was being assailed from different directions.

The Caliph was the successor of Prophet Mohammad, and the problem of appointing a Caliph first arose after the Prophet's death. Through the influence of Aycsha, the Prophet's wife, her father Abu Bakr became Caliph, superseding the claims of Ali, husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Indeed, Ali had to wait for quite some time before becoming the fourth Caliph after the murder of Osman, his predecessor. The Caliphate soon passed on to the house of Muawiya who belonged to the famous Omayyad family, and their capital was in Syria. In 750 the Omayyads were displaced by the Abbasids who were descended from Mohammad's uncle Abbas and who

ruled from Baghdad, but in 1258 Baghdad itself was captured by the Mongols. The Omayyad Caliphate, abolished in Syria, was revived in Spain where the local Muslims placed on the throne a fugitive of the family who had been fleeing from place to place to escape the wrath of the Abbasids. The Fatimate Caliphate also was restored in Egypt in 972 when Moizz was acknowledged as the Caliph, and the reign of this branch, which was Shi-ite, lasted for about two hundred years or, more precisely, till 17 September 1171 when Adid, the last Caliph of this branch, was deposed.

I have rattled off this history<sup>24</sup> just to show that these Caliphs who warred on one another and often reigned simultaneously, though in different places, had one common characteristic. They were directly related to the Prophet or, like the Omayyads, belonged to the Korcish tribe of which the most distinguished scion was the Prophet himself. This is a title which the Turkish Sultan could not claim, as the first Turkish Sultan-Caliph Selim I indirectly admitted. It is said that when in 1517 he obtained this title from the last Abbasid Caliph Mutuwakil, then a refugee in Cairo, he did not set much store by it and even wanted to abolish the Caliphate (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition, 'Turkey'). At one stage the leaders of the Indian Khilafat movement also proclaimed publicly that it was not necessary for the Caliph to be a Koreishi, thus anticipating a possible objection to the legitimacy of their agitation. This is what was asserted in a *fatwa* (edict) which the Ulema issued in 1919 after a meeting of the Khilafat committee in Delhi. But the Ulema were not altogether free from doubts on the subject, for they reinforced their edict with the additional argument that the Sherif of Mecca, who as a Koreishi and possibly also as a descendant of the Prophet had laid claim to the Caliphate against the Sultan of Turkey, was on the pay-roll of the British, and therefore unacceptable to the Muslim world. This question cropped up again after Ibn Saud, a devout Muslim and a Wahabi, had made himself the master of the two most sacred places of Islam, Mecca and Medina. John Gunther says that Ibn Saud did not allow the Khedive of Egypt to assume the Caliphate, which he also would not arrogate to himself on the ground that he too was not a Koreishi.<sup>25</sup>

Acceptance of money from the British—Christian infidels—

was an argument used more than once by Indian Muslim leaders against the Sherif of Mecca and also against Ibn Saud. It is true that the Revolt of the Desert was 'British-made', but equally is it true that the *jihad* proclaimed by the Caliph in 1914 was 'German-made'. Indeed, Turkey's entry into the 1914-18 war seems to have been a mistaken and also a morally dubious move. Although amongst the Allies Russia was a traditional enemy, England and France were old friends, and Turkey might well have stood aloof. But suddenly two German cruisers, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*, which had been lying off Constantinople and had been fictitiously sold to the Turkish Government, began to bombard the Russian port of Odessa, and soon Turkey was at war on the side of Germany.<sup>26</sup> All this had been managed by Enver Pasha, an important member of the Committee of Union and Progress, but also a Germanophile. The Committee of Union and Progress had, however, no vital links with Enver Pasha's personal bias which spelt disaster for Turkey in the First World War, but the episode also helped to bring out the basic motives that inspired Enver's colleagues. The Young Turks movement had more than one facet; its leaders had differences, they were not free from blemishes, they shifted ground, and they had also to reconcile inherited contradictions. But there was nothing obscure or ambiguous in their ultimate objective. They were Anatolians imbued with the spirit of modern European nationalism, and for the attainment of their goal, the Caliphate, as popularly understood, was more a hindrance than a help. They were Pan-Islamics, Pan-Ottoman but also Yeni-Turanian, and this third attribute is what they prized most. Islam is a universal religion practised by men of all countries, but nationalism is restrictive, for it attaches itself to a particular land, a particular race or even to a particular language. Once Turkey had joined the war on the side of Germany against the Allies, it was an advantage to stir rebellion amongst the ranks of the enemy, and therefore the Young Turks raised the standard of Pan-Islamism and *jihad*. But a proclamation issued by them contained the following significant statement of their national ideal:

The ideal of our nation and people leads us towards the destruction of our Muscovite enemy in order thereby to

obtain a natural frontier to our Empire, which should include and unite all branches of *our race*.'<sup>27</sup> (*italics mine*)

The impassioned exponents of Khilafat in India failed to notice this trend, although Maulana Azad, besides being an erudite scholar, took pride in his modern outlook and his acquaintance with the Young Turks and the followers of Mustapha Kemal Pasha. Obviously the Indian leaders of the Khilafat movement had forgotten that immediately after their initial success in 1908 when they forced the Sultan to restore the constitution, the Young Turks had proceeded to rid the Turkish language of its foreign accretions, that is to say, of words derived from Arabic and Persian, and to translate the Quoran into Turkish. What fascination could Jazirat-ul-Arab, consisting of Hedjaz, Yemen, Nejd, Iraq, Palestine and Syria, besides other countries occasionally referred to by Muslim leaders, have for these Turanian nationalists clamouring for the preservation of their racial identity?

Even a rapid survey of the activities of the Indian sponsors of the Khilafat shows how ignorant they were of contemporary developments in Europe. In the Amritsar session of the Muslim League held in December 1919, a resolution was passed proclaiming Sultan Wahiduddin as the recognized Caliph of Islam, and in February 1921 at the Lucknow session the League expressed confidence in the Sultan who was requested to acknowledge and encourage Mustafa Kemal Pasha, but in June 1921 Abul Kalam Azad issued a statement saying that the hopes of the Muslims rested with Muslim nationalists who under Kemal Pasha had set up an independent government at Angora, manifestly in defiance of the Sultan-Caliph! These views were endorsed by the Khilafat Conference of Bihar, which made the surprising statement that the protection of the Khilafat depended on the Angora Government! In May 1919 Sultan Wahiduddin, anxious to make peace with the Allies and to get rid of the inconvenient members of the Young Turks group, had sent Mustapha Kemal to Samsun on the Black Sea coast ostensibly 'to supervise the disarmament and demobilization of the remaining Ottoman forces', and he and his government constantly appealed to the Allied High Commissioners to help suppress the nationalists. Mustapha Kemal was even recalled to

Constantinople, and he evaded punishment by resigning his new appointment. In this context the suggestion that Sultan Wahiduddin should acknowledge and encourage Kemal sounds irrelevant, to put it very mildly. When Maulana Azad said that the hopes of Muslims rested with Kemal, who had set up an independent government at Angora, did he not realize that the Sultan himself was on his way out? Indeed, soon finding that he had not a single subject to do him obeisance, Wahiduddin slipped out of Constantinople on 17 November 1922, but even at that hour he seems to have lingered on too long, for seventeen days earlier the Grand National Assembly at Ankara (Angora) had abolished the Sultanate and elected Abdul Majid as Caliph.

The extinction of the Caliphate or Khilafat after the abolition of the Sultanate was not without an element of irony. Of the 'subjects' of the Sultan none took so much interest as his Indian adherents. This meddlesomeness of Indians irked Mustapha Kemal who pointed out that it was these Muslim peoples who had fought against the Turks. 'It was, it seems', says Bernard Lewis, 'the interest of Indian Muslims in the Caliphate that touched off the crisis which ended with its abolition. On 24 November 1923 three of the major Istanbul daily papers published the text of a letter to Ismet Pasa, signed by two distinguished Indian Muslim leaders, the Aga Khan and Syed Ameer Ali. . . . Mustafa Kemal agreed with his opponents in seeing in the Caliphate the link with the past and with Islam. It was precisely for that reason that he was determined to break it.'<sup>28</sup> And he did break it on 1 March 1924 when the Caliphate followed the way of the Sultanate, and the last Caliph with the members of his family was sent into exile. In the course of a marathon speech which took six days to deliver, Kemal said that the last true Caliph had been murdered in 924, and that it was by violence that the sons of Othman had acquired the power to rule over the Turkish nation which had suffered the 'usurpers' for six centuries and would now put them in their right place. Only a single voice was raised against him when the matter was put to vote. Incidentally, this denunciation also shows that the true Caliph must be a Koreishi rather than an Ottoman.

Syed Ameer Ali, an eminent jurist and a distinguished

scholar in Islamic lore, had settled in England as far back as 1904, twenty years before he signed the letter referred to above. The Aga Khan, whom the British Government in India gave a high status, was the head of the Ismaili sect of Muslims in India and elsewhere, and although he was a respected leader, he was never in direct touch with the actualities of Indian politics. It is more than doubtful whether these eminent men would have thus got involved in the fag-end of this agitation if the tremendous interest taken by Mahatmaji had not given the movement a large dimension, and so in a way Mahatmaji was responsible for the concluding fiasco.

Mahatmaji was proud of his involvement in the Khilafat agitation, and his summing up in the *Autobiography* is not without its touch of self-complacency: 'The adoption of non-cooperation for the sake of the Khilafat was itself a great practical attempt made by the Congress to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity.'<sup>29</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead of bringing the two communities together, it only helped to divide them. The average Hindu did not know what the Khilafat was; neither did he care. As Shakespeare's Hamlet might have said, 'What is Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?' The Hindu (or non-Muslim) lent his support because Mahatmaji had unleashed the pent-up energies of the nation, and if by supporting the Khilafat he could further the cause of Swaraj, so much the better. The average Muslim also did not know much about the Caliphate; indeed, the two slogans chosen for processions were: *Bande Mataram* ('Hail, Motherland') and *Allah-ho-Akbar* ('God is great'). There was no mention of the Caliph, because the masses would not comprehend the problem at all. But one thing was clear to Indians of all shades of opinion. Without Mahatma's leadership the joint movement could be easily crushed, for of him alone the British were afraid. 'No Swaraj without Khilafat and no Khilafat without Swaraj and neither without Mahatma Gandhi'—this was the burden of resolutions passed by the Congress Committees in those days. But this was really a misalliance. No freedom struggle was carried on by an entire community—neither the American Revolution nor the Irish Revolution, not even the Bolshevik Revolution. It was a 'pact' and a bargain, and as two claimants begin to bargain, the mediator tries to exploit the situation. At the end, whatever

might happen to the mediator, the parties making the pact are bound to lose and lose almost equally.

The Khilafat movement ended in a fiasco, but British officials openly said that Gandhi 'used it for his purposes', and Muslims also became acutely conscious of their bargaining power if they remained a separate entity. Mahatmaji thought that he had made a great effort for the achievement of Hindu-Muslim unity, but far from achieving his object, he paved the way for the emergence of two men—(the later) M. A. Jinnah and Nathuram Vinayak Godse.



## From Morley to MacDonald

India is a country which has absorbed various races. Some of them, like the Sakas and the Huns, have been assimilated into Hinduism. Others, like the Jews or the Parsis, have joined the mainstream of national life but have also retained their distinct cultural and religious identity. The largest amongst those who maintained this distinctiveness are the Muslims who in the twenties of the present century accounted for about twenty-five per cent of the total population and were distributed all over the country. The Congress in its early days did not profess to be a revolutionary organization. Its founder was an Englishman, its first President was an anglicized Hindu who in later life settled in London and the second a Parsi who became a member of the British House of Commons. Lord Dufferin, during whose tenure as Viceroy the Congress was founded, welcomed it as an institution that might serve as Her Majesty's Opposition, whose criticisms, though sometimes severe, serve as a check on Her Majesty's Government. Here is a dangerous potentiality which escaped His Excellency's attention. The Opposition in the British Parliament expect to replace His Majesty's Government. Supposing the Congress one day passed from criticism to subversion! That possibility began gradually to dawn on every Britisher interested in retaining this brightest jewel in the British Crown, and as the Congress became more and more extremist, H.M.G. and their representatives in India began more and more to rule by naked oppression and by setting one community against another.

One thing that must have struck the Britisher in India was the gap that separated the majority community from the Muslim minority. It was from the Muslims that the English had taken over the sovereignty of India, largely with the help of some

Hindus. It was under the nominal authority of the last nominal Muslim Emperor, Bahadur Shah, that the rebels of 1857 rallied when they tried to throw the Britishers out. Although participating in the rising of 1857, the Hindus had by then taken avidly to European philosophy and science, so avidly indeed that when the Hindu College was founded in Calcutta in 1817 with the specific objective of propagating modern Western education—*pace* Jawaharlal Nehru (*The Discovery of India*, p. 374)—Rammohun Roy warned the Government against encouraging the study of Sanskrit which through its falsehoods would mislead young men. With the Muslim intelligentsia it was otherwise; they wanted to keep aloof from the contamination of Western culture, confining themselves as far as possible to the education of old-fashioned *maktabs* and *madrassahs*. When Shaukat Ali (b. 1873) was sent to a modern school which his elder brother had already joined, his uncle and guardian objected to spending money on an education that would produce another 'infidel' in the family!<sup>30</sup> This is the principal reason why the Muslims lagged behind the Hindus in the race for the loaves and fishes available in the new order established by the new rulers. The first notable English institution for Muslims, the M.A.O. College at Aligarh, was founded by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1898—eighty-one years after the Hindu College of Calcutta. The interval of eight decades is an index of the distance separating the two communities in political, economic and educational activities.

Politically, the most striking difference between the two communities was that, nursed on Burke's eloquence and Milton's impassioned prose, Hindu India, even when revivalist, was revolutionary in outlook, but the early Muslim exponents of English education were tenaciously devoted to British rule, because they felt that by remaining aloof, they had deprived themselves of the benefits of Government patronage. Sayyid Ahmad, who founded the M.A.O. College, was not only himself a loyal subject of the Crown but also tried to keep his community immune from revolutionary contamination. It was in 1897, a year before the founding of the Aligarh College, that Balgangadhar Tilak, a leading Hindu radical, was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment on a charge of sedition, and by reason of his fiery eloquence Surendranath Banerjea was soon

to be nicknamed Surrender-not! The Muslims took a different view. Although they did not lack militancy, they thought that their interests were relatively safe in the hands of British rulers and so they kept away from movements that savoured of sedition. No wonder that although there was a sprinkling of nationalist Muslims in the Indian National Congress and its third President was Badruddin Tyabji, the loyalists who took their cue from Sayyid Ahmad Khan were the predominant section and they pitched their headquarters at Aligarh. One advantage of Aligarh was that the local M.A.O. College had invariably a British Principal.

## II

In the early years of the twentieth century, the nationalists found a brilliant recruit in M. A. Jinnah, a rising barrister of Bombay High Court, whom Sarojini Naidu hailed as the 'ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity', and she also addressed romantic poems to this man who, however, had no taste for poetry. Nationalist Muslims had other brilliant men in their ranks—Rahmatullah Sayani, Ibrahim Rahimotollah and the Raja of Mahmudabad. As Muslims began increasingly to cultivate a wider outlook, they wanted to establish an organization of their own through which they would be able to join the political life of a united India and yet retain their sectarian identity. In this context 1906 is a landmark in Indian history. It was in this year that at the suggestion of the Nawab of Dacca, the leader of the Muslims in eastern India, the Indian Muslim League was founded, and the Aga Khan presided over its first session a year later. It was in 1906, again, that at the prodding of British officials, who clearly saw that their future in this country lay in wooing the Muslims, the Aga Khan led a deputation of Muslims that waited on the Viceroy and submitted a memorandum demanding separate electorates for Muslims.<sup>31</sup> Was Anglo-Indian officialdom behind the scenes also at the foundation of the Muslim League? The suggestion cannot be brushed aside as improbable, for W. A. J. Archbold, who played an important part in organizing the deputation and probably drafted the memorandum submitted by them, was Principal of both the colleges, those at Aligarh and Dacca. It is true that he

could not be present in the two places at the same time. But Archbold was a typical figure of those days. Some other like-minded official or officials might have done the job at Dacca.

Anglo-Indian officials took their cue from British politicians, Conservative and Liberal, as these politicians also gathered their information from officials out in India. Gladstone is one of those few men who have rightly been praised for bringing public affairs within the purview of ethical principles. Gladstone had his bias and prejudices, but on the whole it might be said that he did not allow self-interest, personal or national, to colour his political conduct. Yet some of his disciples who professed to follow his lofty principles were crafty, mean people who could stoop to the worst form of chicanery. The present narrative is concerned with two Gladstonian radicals who pretended liberal principles but were indistinguishable from diehard Conservatives where imperial and colonial affairs were concerned. One of them is David Lloyd George, who became Prime Minister in 1916 when the First World War was in a critical stage and who piloted Britain to victory in 1918. This war ended when Germany surrendered in November 1918 and the Versailles Treaty was signed in June 1919. Germany's ally Turkey had collapsed earlier and sued for armistice which was signed on 20 October.

In the negotiations that followed the surrender of Turkey, Lloyd George acted with unabashed duplicity. It was his government that had, through the intrepid and resourceful T. E. Lawrence, fomented the revolt of the desert in what the Muslims loved to call Jazirat-ul-Arab (the Island of Arabs), and yet it was Lloyd George himself who in early 1918, promised to maintain the integrity of the Caliph's dominions, particularly the rich lands of Thrace and Anatolia. He then proceeded to impose the Treaty of Sèvres, which posited the practical dissolution of Turkey, and if Turkey survives today as an independent and racially compact nation, it is due to the heroic exploits of Kemal Pasha and his determined followers. Although it would not be very relevant to the present context, Lloyd George was equally perfidious to Jazirat-ul-Arab, where he set up a bunch of mandatory states, and his own trusted agent, the famous Lawrence of Arabia, had to retire in disgust. Lloyd

George, however, was hoist with his own petard, for alarmed at his adventurism, his Conservative partners disowned him, and the abolition of the Caliphate by Kemal in 1924 was preceded by the fall of Lloyd George's own ministry in 1923.

Another Gladstonian liberal, John Morley, made a mockery of the master's lofty principles and, in fact, did much greater harm to the cause of nationalism than Lloyd George. A distinguished scholar and writer, biographer of Burke and Gladstone, Morley seems, in retrospect, to be a bundle of cynicism and hypocrisy. The urge for initiating reforms in Indian administration is traceable to two causes. There was widespread discontent in India in the wake of Curzon's Partition of Bengal, which the Government was not willing to annul. The Indian National Congress was pressing for what later came to be described as progressive self-government, and in 1906 Dadabhai Naoroji as President of the Congress put forward a plea for Swaraj, which is the Sanskrit equivalent of self-government. It was in this context that in 1906 John Morley proceeded to grant some reforms to India, because Valentine Chirol, Sidney Low and others had told him that India could no longer be governed in the old way. The distinguishing feature of these reforms was the introduction of elective legislatures which was quite in line with Gladstonian liberalism, for the master had adhered to the value of representative institutions 'with a faith which was singularly literal'. Morley's principal reforms provided for (a) the entry of elected representatives into the Imperial Legislature, (b) the numerical predominance of non-official members in the Provincial Legislatures and (c) the appointment of Indians to Central and Provincial Executive Councils. But all this was play-acting and not a democratic experiment. Morley's own words are illuminating: 'If it could be said that this Chapter of Reforms led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a Parliamentary system in India, I for one would have nothing to do with it.'

In effect the Morley-Minto reforms were a step in the opposite direction, for they were really meant to stand in the way of the establishment of 'representative government' in the true sense of the term.<sup>32</sup> Morley knew this when he introduced the principle of separate electorates for Muslims and non-Muslims, for when later on some real power would, in fact, be delegated

to elected legislators, a Muslim would be governed by a non-Muslim in whose election he had no voice and vice versa, while the essence of representative government is that howsoever remote the connexion might be, a member of the government is representative of and responsible to everyone exercising franchise. Here, and not in the establishment of the M.A.O. College at Aligarh in 1898 or of the foundation of the Muslim League in 1906-7, we have the seed of the two-nation theory which found its fullest expression in Pakistan. The M.A.O. College, which freely admitted non-Muslim students, was intended to lay special emphasis on the education of Muslims who had lagged behind Hindus and other progressive communities. There is nothing about this College suggestive of a political separation between Hindus and Muslims, and if the founder Sayyid Ahmad wanted to keep aloof from politics, it was because he felt that the first problem of his community was educational and economic backwardness, and it is as loyal subjects of the British Crown rather than through political agitation that Muslims would be able to get over this handicap. The same thing is true of the Muslim League too, which was founded to preserve and foster the special interests of the community, not to separate Muslims from non-Muslims in the political sphere.

That the Aligarh University and also the Muslim League could be used to drive a wedge between the majority community and the Muslims was an idea which originated with the British bureaucracy and British politicians who tried to perpetuate their domination. Lord Morley sought a moral *alibi* by protesting that the principle of separate electorates was 'Minto's hare', and we know that Minto got this 'hare' from Principal Archbold through his Private Secretary, but it was as much Morley's hare as Minto's. The Aga Khan deputation waited on the Viceroy on 1 October 1906, but a few months earlier, on 6 June, Morley had written to Minto warning him about 'the Congress Party and Congress principles' and about his own apprehension that the Muslims would 'throw in their lot with the Congressmen against you [Minto]'. So when he heard of the deputation, he was full of glee and referred to it on 26 October as a kind of 'deliverance'—a well-chosen word used by a distinguished writer of English. After this stage-managed affair, their critics

would not be able to represent the Indian Government as a case of 'bureaucracy versus the people'. Morley could not be altogether unaware of the preparations made by the bureaucracy for this show, for on the day—1 October 1906—on which the deputation waited on the Viceroy in India, the London *Times* and other English newspapers came out with articles on the wisdom of Indian Muslims and their distaste for representative government on the European model. 'Separate electorates' was hatched by a conspiracy of British politicians, administrators, journalists and the bureaucracy, both in England and in India.

### III

Separate electorates, which Morley looked upon as a 'deliverance', became both a weapon and a bait in the hands of the British rulers who began to use it as a criterion for awarding prizes and punishments, for making representative government a mockery and for driving a permanent wedge between the two communities. For the attainment of these objectives they tried to use the Muslim League as their chief instrument, as is demonstrated by the political history of India in the three decades preceding the Partition of 1947. Before giving an account of the League's oscillations, I shall cite the single example of A. K. Fazlul Haq, often called *Shere-Bangal* or the Bengal Tiger, an epithet also applied to Asutosh Mookerjee. Fazlul Haq's upbringing was both traditional and modern and his connexions both aristocratic and plebeian. He was essentially a man of the people, and although in Bengal no other Muslim enjoyed the confidence of Hindus to the extent he did, it was the improvement of the lot of Muslims which he made the mission of his life. He was a member of the Congress but left it when the Congress adopted the policy of non-cooperation in 1920. He was one of the principal organizers of the Muslim League, provincial and central, and presided over its all-India session in 1921. But when the League, thanks to the manipulations of the British bureaucrats and Muslim politicians, became a sectarian organization, Fazlul Haq, who was indeed the true ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, severed his connexion with it. He now founded his Krishak Praja Party, and it was on this ticket that

he entered the Bengal Legislative Council in 1937, defeating Khwaja Nazimuddin, a landed aristocrat and the sheet-anchor of the British bureaucracy, but a mediocrity and a man altogether identified with the Muslim League, which now under Jinnah was committed to a reactionary and separatist policy.

After this blazing victory, which was a severe blow to the League, Fazlul Haq offered to form a coalition government with the Congress party. If such a government had been formed then, it would have given a tremendous fillip to the movement in favour of a united India. But the wisecracks who formed the Congress High Command vetoed such a move for reasons not difficult to fathom. The leader of the Congress Legislature Party was Saratchandra Bose, elder brother of Subhaschandra Bose, and if such a person, already a prominent and influential figure, helped form a ministry, it would be an encroachment on the self-seeking coterie constituting the Congress Parliamentary Board which was generally known as the Congress High Command.

The aim of this coterie was power for themselves, to which the first step was the elimination of Nariman, Khare and the Boses. In this situation Fazlul Haq had to enter into a coalition with the League, taking Nazimuddin as his second-in-command. But after some time this coalition broke down, and Fazlul Haq formed a new ministry in association with Syamaprasad Mookerjee, leader of the Hindus, and now Congress support also was available. It was a blow not only to the Muslim League but also to its British patrons. To cut a long story short, this united ministry of Hindus and Muslims was eased out of office by the Governor Sir John Herbert, and at long last Fazlul Haq had to rejoin the League in 1946. Haq's career is a significant commentary on the League's rapacity as well as on British perfidy and Congress folly and hypocrisy.

The transformation of the Muslim League into a militant separatist organization could not be accomplished in a day. Although pro-British in its infancy, it had to find room for nationalist Muslims, who, while sensitive about their separate religious identity, did not wish to forgo their political aspirations which tied them to India. The views of these men were best expressed by Ibrahim Rahimotollah at the Agra session of the League held in 1913: 'India is our motherland, our proud



heritage, and must in the end be handed over to us by our guardians.' No Congress President could express himself more pithily and more forcefully. Such sentiments could not appeal to the Aga Khan, a devout Muslim but very much westernized in his ways and outlook, and these sentiments must have been gall and wormwood also to our British 'guardians'. The Aga Khan resigned in 1913 and was succeeded a year later by M. A. Jinnah who tried to bring the Congress and the League closer to each other by making both the organizations hold their annual sessions at about the same time and at the same place. But the virus of communalism, introduced by the Morley-Minto reforms, continued to thrive under official patronage. In 1910 Ramsay MacDonald, then a fire-eating radical, remarked in *The Awakening of India*, 'The Mahomedan leaders are inspired by certain Anglo-Indian officials, and these officials . . . of malice aforethought sowed discord between Hindu and Mahomedan communities by showing the Muslims special favour.'<sup>33</sup> If in January 1918 Lloyd George came forward with smooth promises about Turkey and the Khilafat, it was largely to win Muslim support for the Montford reforms which, it was feared, the Hindus would reject. Some years later Jinnah would drift away from the Congress and find his greatest patron in Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, and neither of them would look back on his 'salad days'.

The Aga Khan had left and Jinnah, who had brought the Congress and the League together, seemed to be the coming man in Indian politics. In the Congress the old leadership was thinning out. By 1915 Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta were dead, and Surendranath Banerjea was holding the reins somewhat shakily, for the Extremists, headed by Tilak, were on their way back. The Congress now needed an energetic middle-of-the-road man like Jinnah, and so did the League. No wonder that when in 1913 Jinnah joined the League at the urgent request of Mohammad Ali and Wazir Hasan, he made it a condition that this would not interfere with his association with the Congress.<sup>34</sup> As was only to be expected, such a talented man seemed to be an asset to both the organizations, and their growing nearness was reflected in the Lucknow Pact of 1916.

Jinnah, however, really belonged to neither the League nor the Congress. He knew only one party and that consisted of

only one member—M. A. Jinnah. That is why he wanted to keep his options open. If he could retain the allegiance of both the organizations, he would lead both and go from one eminent position to another. If that was impossible, he would jilt one of the organizations and dominate the other. Through all his ambivalences, contradictions, and gyrations runs one clear thread—self-love. When preparations for introduction of separate electorates were afoot, he signed the memorandum submitted in 1909 by the Bombay Presidency Association opposing the mischievous move. But he had no scruple in getting elected to the Imperial Legislative Council from the Muslim constituency of Bombay in 1910, and yet it was in the Congress of 1910 that he moved and Mazhar-ul-Haque seconded the resolution condemning separate electorates! When the Congress met in 1916, the First World War was two years old and it was clear that the tide of German onset had been stemmed. So it was felt that different parties should close their ranks and present a united front when a new order would be established after the termination of hostilities. The Extremists, who had been expelled from the Congress after the Surat session of 1907, were taken back, and when the Congress and the League both met at Lucknow, they entered into a pact convenient for both. Here Jinnah played a leading part, guaranteeing separate electorates for Muslims, who in return joined the Congress in the demand for self-government. Jinnah cared as little or as much for separate electorates as for self-government for India. But separate electorates would assure him not only a safe seat but possibly also a solid bloc of Muslim supporters, and as for the Congress, he had, he thought, already made his position secure there.

It was under pressure that Jinnah joined the Muslim League which he would one day dominate, but initially he had his hesitations and rightly so. In the Muslim League there were elements that seemed to be uncongenial for him. There were loyalists who felt that since Muslims had lagged behind other communities, it was only by co-operation with the Government that they could secure educational facilities, preferential treatment in recruitment to services and also other forms of governmental patronage. These people did not want to pester the Government with proposals for self-government and Home Rule. On the other hand, the orthodox section disliked Jinnah

for his westernized way of life. But these protests were not very pronounced, and all groups—in the Congress as well as the League—were dazzled by his brilliance in the Imperial Legislative Council, where on 6 February 1919 he sounded a warning that if the Rowlatt Bills were passed, Government would ‘create in the country from one end to the other a discontent and agitation the like of which they have not witnessed’. He prophesied correctly, but Jinnah had not reckoned with the advent of a man whom this discontent and agitation would bring to the forefront and who would overshadow every other leader. His name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Both Jinnah and Gandhi belonged to Bombay Presidency, and both were barristers. But there the similarity ends. Jinnah was immaculately dressed, generally in costly western clothes, and Gandhi was half-clad in homespun *khadi*. Jinnah had all the wealth of an eminently successful barrister, and when he married, he married the daughter of a rich Parsi baronet. Whoever might be Gandhi’s wife, he, like St. Francis of Assisi, was wedded to Lady Poverty. Gandhi always looked back to the past; he wanted to establish *Ramrajya*, and also championed the ancient institution of Khilafat for which Jinnah did not seem to care. Both of them were egotists—but with a difference. Gandhi’s egotism stemmed from his moral obsession, his religion of *ahimsa*. Jinnah’s eyes were always fixed on himself, and his actions were guided by expediency. Later on people warned him that Pakistan would be vulnerable to aggression, that it would not be economically viable and that the two halves would soon break asunder. He parried such warnings and questionings. He must have it—here and now, and that was all.

In spite of the opposition of Jinnah and many other leaders, the Rowlatt Bills were passed into law in 1919. There were widespread disturbances followed by General Dyer’s atrocities at Amritsar, and it was there that the Congress held its annual session. Although Tilak and others were present and Motilal Nehru was President, this time the Congress was Gandhi’s Congress, in fact ‘the first Gandhi Congress’.<sup>35</sup> Immediately after this session, Gandhiji began to draw up his plans for the Non-cooperation movement which he was forced to launch primarily for an honourable solution to the Khilafat problem. As was quite natural, Gandhiji consulted many Muslims—the Ali

Brothers, Abul Kalam Azad, Ajmal Khan, and also members of the League—but it is noticeable that Jinnah was left out in the cold. In the next annual session of the Congress held at Nagpur in December 1920, Gandhiji was again the leading figure who secured the overwhelming support of the Muslims present on the occasion, two notable dissentients being A. K. Fazlul Haq and M. A. Jinnah. The support extended to Gandhiji was so tremendous that nobody took any notice of the dissentients, which must have been galling to Jinnah. A few sentences from the report sent from Nagpur by the then Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces may be quoted: 'The outstanding feature of the Congress has been the personal domination of Gandhi over all political leaders. . . . The Moderates of Nagpur were not heard, the Extremist opponents under Khaparde and Moonje were brushed aside. Pandit Madanmohan Malaviya's efforts were negatory; Jinnah carried no influence. Lajpat Rai wobbled and then became silent.'<sup>36</sup> Jinnah promptly left the Congress.

In 1920 Jinnah suffered another—a minor—discomfiture which was very significant in the light of later events. Gandhi not only controlled the Congress but also became President of the Home Rule League to which he gave a new name—Swaraj Sabha—and a new constitution. Jinnah objected to the first article of the amended constitution which omitted all reference to the British connexion. 'I want my country', said Gandhi in reply, '*to have Swaraj with or without British connexion*'<sup>37</sup> (*italics mine*). Jinnah paused a little and resigned from the Home Rule League. He was right; the British connexion might be a matter of indifference to Gandhi but it was vital for Jinnah who had now three clients—the Congress, the Muslim League and the British. He was out of the Congress, and if he were to extract the maximum advantage for himself out of the League, which represented a minority, his main prop must be his British connexion.

#### IV

So long as the Khilafat agitation lasted, Jinnah, who had taken no part in it, had to keep a low profile, and he had parted from the Congress and the Home Rule League, never to return

to these organizations or to join the later Indian Independence League. His Muslim League had been eclipsed by the Khilafat committees which were dominated by the Ali Brothers who, under Gandhiji's patronage, had come into sudden prominence. But the Khilafat question could not be kept alive after the abolition of the age-old institution by Mustapha Kemal in March 1924; the Central Khilafat Committee became a social service organization and soon passed into oblivion. In 1925 Jinnah got an opportunity of taking part in public affairs when he went to England and Europe in connexion with the Indianization of the Army, and on return to India he was re-elected to the Central Legislative Assembly.

During the five years of Non-cooperation and Khilafat agitation, his attitude changed somewhat. His adoring biographer Hector Bolitho refers to his weakening campaign for Hindu-Muslim unity and blames it on the rigidity of the Hindus.<sup>38</sup> But it is Jinnah who had changed and not the Hindus, and the cause of the change was personal ambition which had found a new avenue and a clearer direction. In 1916 he had pleaded for the retention of separate electorates on the ground that 'it was a necessity to the Muslims, who had to be roused from the coma and torpor into which they [had] fallen for so long'. After all, he pleaded, they were a minority in the country. But once out of the Congress, he adopted a strident, aggressive attitude towards the organization from which he had parted for ever. As Ramsay MacDonald pointed out in 1910, British officialdom wanted to favour the Muslims as against the Hindus, and in 1925-28 Birkenhead was urging the Viceroy to array the Muslims to terrify the immense Hindu majority. Jinnah, who set much store by the British connexion, must fall into line and rally the Muslims for the confrontation that was ardently wished by Birkenhead. He now declared at the League session of 1926 that communalism, which did exist in the country, could not be wished away by time or sentiment. He organized a meeting of Muslims at Delhi in March 1927, where demands were formulated on the basis of which Muslims could accept joint electorates. Thinking that a rapprochement would be made on the basis of equal partnership, he went a step further and supported the nationalist movement for a boycott of the Simon Commission when its appointment was announced in November 1927,

and in the ensuing Calcutta session of the Muslim League he expressed views which even Subhaschandra Bose considered 'progressive'.<sup>39</sup>

Jinnah went to Europe early in 1928 where he spent a few months. There he became aware of the militant attitude of the Conservative Government and realized the significance of the parallel Muslim League which had held its session at Lahore, offering co-operation to the Simon Commission. Jinnah saw clearly that if he did not help the British in terrifying the immense Hindu population and in framing a constitution 'altogether destructive of the Hindu position', someone else would. He returned to India with a determination to carry on a relentless campaign against the Hindus and present himself as the principal bastion of British rule in India. The Nehru Report published in August 1928 he damned as neither helpful nor fruitful, though the difference between this report and the Muslim demands made a year before at Delhi was only peripheral. He talked ominously of 'revolution and civil war', thus closing the door on further negotiations. After this neither the Secretary of State in London nor the Viceroy in India would leave Jinnah 'high and dry', as Birkenhead had threatened in February 1928.<sup>40</sup>

In March 1929 Jinnah presented a Fourteen Points programme to which he stuck for ten years with irrational tenacity, for even though almost all these points had been conceded by 1935, he pressed them on Jawaharlal Nehru in 1937 when he himself was beginning to have second thoughts about the first point—the one about Federation. What was relevant was that while in England, he had decided (or been advised to decide) on reverting to separate electorates (Point No. 5) which would be the bedrock of his later plea for division of India into separate States. An illuminating document, which he himself never mentioned again and which, curiously enough, historians and chroniclers have ignored, was an alternative to the Fourteen Points, which posited that Muslims were prepared to accept joint electorates if certain demands, such as creation of Sind and N.W.F.P., were conceded.<sup>41</sup> Even when these and other demands were met and the differences were further narrowed, Jinnah never reverted to this alternative plan which accepted joint electorates. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that when

Jinnah now presented the Fourteen Points which had become largely irrelevant and also formulated his later demands, the voice was the voice of Jinnah but the hand was the hand of his British mentors—from Birkenhead and Samuel Hoare to Linlithgow and Amery.

Jinnah's friends, admirers and apologists have built up a myth that he was a disappointed, frustrated man—somewhat of a tragic figure—in 1928 and in 1931 when he sought refuge in England. Nothing could be further from the truth. In 1927 he was somewhat puzzled by the announcement of the composition of the Simon Commission and by the parallel Muslim League which held its sitting at Lahore and was presided over by Mohammad Shafi, an ex-member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Even on landing at Bombay he made laconic or cryptic remarks about the Nehru Report, which showed that after consultation with his British mentors he was chalking out other plans and programmes. He returned home beaming with confidence, and—if I may use his own phrase—a 'showboy' of the British. That was his 'role' for eighteen years till Prime Minister Attlee's declaration of British policy on 15 March 1946.

We get a sparkling glimpse of this new Jinnah in a private letter written in May 1929 by Mrs French, wife of the Deputy Adjutant General, who attended a Viceregal dinner-party at Simla where Jinnah had gone soon after enunciating his Fourteen Points as a counterblast to the Nehru Report, which all the available evidence shows he had not cared to read through. 'After dinner', says Mrs French, 'I had Jinnah to talk to. He models his manners and clothes on Du Maurier, the actor . . . He is a future Viceroy, if the present system of gradually Indianizing all the services continues.'<sup>42</sup> Is the last sentence an x-ray photograph of Jinnah's inner thinking? In any case it was he who now wrote to Prime Minister MacDonald suggesting a Round Table Conference; if, *inter alia*, he also condemned the Simon Commission, it was only to keep up a show of consistency. This was in June 1929. Not quite unexpectedly, Simon also made the same recommendation about a Round Table Conference four months later. Thus the two parallel lines now met and Anglo-Jinnah collaboration went on unimpeded. He soon jettisoned the scheme of Federation which was the first of

his Fourteen Points, describing the federation of all-India as a 'mirage', as 'a golden illusion'.<sup>43</sup> Whatever he might say afterwards, it is quite clear from his speeches and actions in the early thirties that he stayed on in London because, somewhat in the manner of the Elder Pitt, he would win his Indian objective—the Viceroyalty of a Federal Indian Union or the Kingdom of Pakistan—on the banks of the Thames. In 1930 there was the first Round Table Conference; more importantly, there was a change in H.M.G. and Sir Samuel Hoare became the Secretary of State in the new Cabinet. In August 1932 Ramsay MacDonald announced his notorious Communal Award which divided the electorate into seventeen unequal bits, and in October Samuel Hoare completed the process by confirming the final acceptance of what was left out in the Award—one-third representation of Muslims in the Centre and guaranteeing through central subvention the financial viability of Sind as a separate province. Only one of the fourteen points remained; Muslims, who formed the majority in Bengal and Punjab, were not given a majority of seats in the Provincial Legislatures. In Bengal it did not matter, because out of 250 seats 119 went to Muslims and 25 to Europeans who represented 0.01 per cent of the population. As we all know, these 25 members were always in alliance with the Muslim League, which was a great advantage to Jinnah who could not as yet count on the support of all the Muslim members. Those who remember the course of events of those days can testify to the tenacity with which the European bloc stood behind the League and how the Governor made Fazlul Haq resign to enable the League to come back to power. About Punjab there was the difficulty about the Sikhs who had to be given weightage as the Muslims were given weightage at the Centre. Another disadvantage—it might also be called a debacle for the Anglo-Jinnah lobby—was that Gandhi saved the integrity of the Hindu community with the consent of Ambedkar and Rajah, the two most prominent leaders of the Scheduled Castes.

Jinnah stayed on in London where he began to practise as a barrister, and later on he said, I think for the first time in 1938, that he had been dished by all the parties and had nothing to look forward to in India. It was a fiction he deliberately created to hoodwink his opponents and some foolish and fussy Hindus



who chose to promote Hindu-Muslim unity by flattering him. In fact he had gained what he wanted and more than he could expect. And now he must stay on to see that all the promises were formally incorporated in the Act and also to draw up future programmes. There might be last-minute changes, like the one about a separate electorate for Depressed Hindus, and in fact the Government issued a communique that the Award would be amended if the different communities agreed among themselves and jointly pressed for any amendment. In London he would be beyond the reach of intermediaries, and he would come back at the right time with other schemes.

Another reason was more imperative and more alluring. Supposing the provinces—Bengal and Punjab, Sind and N.W.F.P. and even Assam—came to the League, there would be the Central Government which would hold the whiphand, and one-third could never be equal to two-thirds. So Jinnah, having gained his Fourteen Points, was now out to throw over the first of them, namely the Federal structure, and here also it is the British who gave him the cue. The Joint Parliamentary Committee of 1933–34 observed in course of its Report: ‘India is inhabited by many races . . . Two-thirds of the inhabitants profess Hinduism in one form or another as their religion, over 77 million are followers of Islam . . . They may be said, indeed, to represent two distinct and separate civilizations.’ Here, we may say, the voice was the voice of the British but the hand was the hand of Jinnah.

It was for these things that Jinnah had come to England, and he had achieved most of them. The Government of India Act marked the culmination of one stage and the beginning of another. Jinnah’s work in England being finished, he could now complete it in India. His later speech to Aligarh students (1938) about his frustration at the Round Table Conference, which he had been the first to suggest, shows that he really modelled his manners on the actor Du Maurier. Since it was in 1932 that he got in England all that he had wanted in 1929 in India, why should he feel disappointed and depressed? And was he the man to be swayed by Liaquat Ali Khan, till then an unknown figure, whose name does not occur amongst the Muslim leaders who took part in the important meetings held in Delhi and Calcutta in 1927 and 1928?<sup>44</sup> Jinnah on return from England did choose

Liaquat Ali as his second in command, but that was precisely because Liaquat Ali was without any following or any brilliance. Such a man would be a more convenient instrument than a recognized leader with commitments or with an ambition to supersede him. There was another reason, although a minor one, why he had not returned to India before now. The Viceroy in 1931-36 was Lord Willingdon against whom Jinnah had led a demonstration when Willingdon was Governor of Bombay. Willingdon's successor was a man after his own heart and might have been—who knows—a man of his choice. Linlithgow's Indian Vicereignty has been best summed up by P. C. Ghose, a member of the Congress Working Committee for many years: 'There was no Muslim League Ministry in any province in 1939 when the War began, but in 1943 when Lord Linlithgow retired, Muslim League Ministries had, by his support, been installed in Bengal, Assam, N.W.F.P. and Sind—four of the provinces claimed by the League as parts of what was proposed as Pakistan.'<sup>45</sup>

Coming back to India, Jinnah attacked Federation in 1935 and then in 1936 engaged himself in carrying on propaganda for the Muslim League in the elections to be held under the 1935 Act, which had satisfied most of his demands. The results of the election, however, fell far short of his expectations, for of the total of 495 Muslim seats, the Muslim League won only 108, or less than 25%, drawing a blank in the newly created provinces—items in his Fourteen Points—of Sind and N.W.F.P. But he was not to be daunted so long as the British, the ultimate arbiters, were on his side. Since the Joint Parliamentary Committee had recognized Hindus and Muslims as two separate 'civilizations', the political problem, according to him, could not be decided on democratic principles. Sudeten Germans, he pointed out, were taken over by fascist Germany from Czechoslovakia on the ground of racial affinity, and in the same way Muslims, who were a separate nation, should be divided from Hindus. Here Jinnah was Janus-faced. When claiming separation from Hindus in the thirties primarily on the strength of the Joint Parliamentary Committee Report, Fascism was to him both an ideal and an anathema. He justified fascist Germany's slicing off Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia on racial grounds, but he would have no truck with the Congress which was a

fascist, authoritarian organization. He worked himself up to this position in 1940 when he posed also as a champion of Depressed Class Hindus, Jews and Parsis and even went to the length of supporting Dravidstan for the south. And then a Sikhistan for the Sikhs in Punjab—ay, there's the rub!

He now proposed the creation of two sovereign States for Muslims—one in the north-west and the other in the east, and said in the same breath that there should be a separate homeland for the 60,000,000 Muslims out of a total of 90,000,000, that is to say, one single state for the two wings. How would the two wings or the two sovereign States be connected? About the 30,000,000 Muslims left over in Hindu India and the minorities in the Muslim State or States, he said that they would be given safeguards which would be effective, adequate and mandatory, but he did not elaborate on the subject beyond assuring the Sikhs that 'they would always occupy an honoured place and would play an effective and influential role' in an Islamic State. Although Muslims had justifiable apprehensions about the majority rule of the Hindus and were therefore right to demand a separate homeland, Hindu or Sikh minorities need have no fear from Muslim majorities, on whose behalf he said with confidence, '... the minorities in our homelands will find that with our traditions and our heritage and the teaching of Islam, not only shall we be fair and just to them but generous.'<sup>46</sup>

The above effusions only decorate but do not conceal his dependence on the British as the ultimate dispensers of 'autonomy', which he here deliberately equates with independence, but it could not be unknown to an experienced lawyer like Jinnah that 'autonomy' in political parlance was and is limited sovereignty under a suzerain power. Otherwise he could not have spoken of 'mandatory' 'safeguards' for the minorities in Pakistan and in truncated India. That Jinnah depended ultimately on the British for the protection of Pakistan and for safeguarding her interests is clear from the interview he gave to the *News Chronicle* of London, in which he maintained that in the transitional period, which would be as long as the British might like to make it, British forces would maintain order, and he did not reckon with the possibility of their quitting India for ever. 'Even so', said he, 'we should enjoy a degree of autonomy which we do not possess today.'<sup>47</sup> After the Prime Minister's

declaration of 15 March 1946 the transitional period was reduced to a minimum, and Jinnah was baulked of much that he had expected, but Pakistan was, indeed, created as a separate independent state.

The story of the creation of Pakistan will be taken up at a later stage of the present work. What is relevant here is that today there are more than sixty-one million Muslims in India (according to the Census of 1961), and some of them are occupying the highest positions, from President, Defence Chief to Provincial Chief Minister, in public life. But in spite of his tall talk about heritage, traditions and the teaching of religion, if in today's Pakistan one has to look for a Hindu, one would have to look for a rarity, and other minorities—Parsis, Indian Christians, Jews etc., if there be any, must form a microscopic entity. Taking a cue from his mentors, Jinnah also posed as the champion of the Depressed classes amongst Hindus, and some of their leaders began to dance to his slogans too. It is true that in a caste-dominated society, the lower castes, particularly the so-called untouchables, had been oppressed by the higher, but equally is it true that during the last half a century or so the oppression has been significantly minimized, thanks to Gandhiji's efforts and the new awakening amongst these classes or the change of outlook in their erstwhile oppressors. During this period of Anglo-Jinnah collaboration, two men came into the limelight; of them B. R. Ambedkar achieved greatness and Jogendranath Mandal had greatness thrust upon him by Jinnah who made him, first, Law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and then of Pakistan. Ambedkar stayed on to draft the Constitution of India, and after his death he is respectfully remembered as one of the makers of modern India. Jogendranath Mandal strutted and fretted his hour upon the stage of Karachi, and then finding the atmosphere too hot for him, slipped into India where he lived and died in obscurity. As the British guardians of law and order, on whom Jinnah counted, did not stay on, the two Muslim homelands, artificially joined together into one State, separated after the first General Election, but there were several thousand Muslims of the western wing left stranded in the east, and they now present a spectacle at once intriguing and anomalous.

## V

When with the passing of the Act of 1935 Jinnah returned to India, he spoke in a dictatorial vein, passing from one extravagant claim to another. Not only was he pampered by the British, but the Congress High Command seemed to reduce themselves into a helpless *Oliver Twist*, whose prayer now was, 'Please, Sir, demand a little less'. All the leaders joined in this mission of appeasement without noticing that it was not only an unworthy venture but one that was also logically indefensible. Jinnah seized on the illogicality of the Congress position at once and made excellent use of it, but the High Command, in their anxiety to enjoy power, were as impervious to reason as they were devoid of self-respect. If the Congress represented the whole nation and Jinnah was only a sectional leader—by 1937 election results, of less than 25 p.c. of Muslims—why should the Congress at any time countenance the assumption that Hindu-Muslim unity depended on negotiations between the Congress and a sectional leader of the Muslims? If Jinnah as the President of the League had anything to say, it was for him to approach the Congress, which he never did. The Congress High Command said that the minority problem was theirs to solve after the British had left, and then immediately proceeded to appease Jinnah even when the British were very much there, enjoying the predicament they had created for the Congress. The attitude of the cringing High Command is a sad contrast to Kemal Pasha's stiff comment on the Aga Khan who had sent a letter on behalf of Indian Muslims, and Kemal scoffed at His Highness, saying that he was only a leader of the Khoja sect and had no right to speak on behalf of the entire Muslim community. Jinnah, it may be recalled, was also a Khoja!

It is not merely that the High Command degraded themselves by trying to pamper Jinnah, but Mahatmaji himself came down to placate this sectional leader, thus helping the common enemy who thought that having an ally in Ambedkar, they could cut Gandhi and the Congress leaders to size by taking them as representatives of caste Hindus who could be given numerical parity with the Muslim League. Mahatmaji had his moral egotism, but where personalities were concerned, nobody could be less self-conscious than he. But his immediate as-

sociates, Nehru and Patel and Rajaji, should have, in the larger interests of the nation, prevented Mahatmaji from having any truck with a man who had put 'British connexion' above Home Rule and who had ceased to believe in the unity of India. 'It was', says Maulana Azad, 'largely due to Gandhiji's acts of commission and omission that Jinnah regained his importance in Indian political life.'<sup>48</sup> This was in 1944 when it was too late.

Subhaschandra Bose, who stood outside the High Command, had once to soil his hands by writing to Jinnah, but that was when he was, at Gandhiji's suggestion, made President of the Haripura Congress and was thus a prisoner of the old, old Working Committee. Left to himself, he showed amused contempt for the man who expressed one view in 1927 and its opposite—after an English sojourn—in 1928. 'An independent Pakistan', said he later on, 'is an impossibility and Pakistan, therefore, means, in practice, dividing India in order to ensure British domination for all. . . . Jinnah . . . has acknowledged that the creation and maintenance of Pakistan is possible only with the help of the British.'<sup>49</sup> So Subhaschandra gave up the idea of having any truck with the President of the Muslim League, nor could he expect anything from the President of the Hindu Mahasabha who was primarily interested in Hindu young men joining the British Army and securing military training.

After half a century of intriguing and manipulation, H.M.G. decided on quitting India, and baulked of the British protection he had counted on, Jinnah got a 'maimed' Pakistan with its two halves widely separated. He clung to a last straw, a corridor of seven hundred miles linking the two halves, hoping that Britain would stay on to guard it. But as Britain had made up her mind to quit, she gave him a 'mangled' Pakistan without a corridor, and it was destined to be further 'mangled' twenty-five years later when the new state of Bangladesh came into being. Jinnah snatched at Kashmir and Junagad in vain, and Hyderabad also went to India. The north-western wing remained an independent state certainly, but the people there have been enjoying more the fruits of martial law than political or social freedom. If Jinnah had been alive in 1975 at his centenary, he would probably have said, echoing Macbeth: 'I [had] no spur/To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition, which o'erleap[t] itself/And [fell] on the other.'

## A 'Homogeneous' Working Committee

When Winston Churchill shuddered at the prospect of a half-clad, seditious Fakir striding up the steps of the Viceregal palace, he had a feeling of hatred and disgust at the advent of a force that he also respected and feared. When the actual transfer of power came, he knew that the naked Fakir was not in the picture at all, but Churchill could also size up the men who would occupy the Viceregal palace and take charge of an empire that had supplied four shillings in every pound of a Britisher's income. And in utter contempt he thus fulminated in the House of Commons: 'In handing over the Government of India to these so-called political classes, we are handing over to men of straw, of whom, in a few years, no trace will remain.' It is very difficult to say what a few years or a few thousand years might do. A German philosopher has lamented that the insignificant Augustus made an epoch while the great Tiberius has passed into oblivion.<sup>50</sup> And Churchill's scathing comment, made in reply to Attlee's statement of 20 February 1947, was not altogether without substance.

### II

When Gandhi became the undisputed leader of the Congress, he also gave it a new shape. It should not content itself with merely holding an annual session but grow into an organization that would effectively and continuously participate in the political, social and economic life of the people. The country was divided into linguistic provinces which should have their own set-up with branches at the district or sub-divisional levels. The Provincial Congress Committees would form an All-India Congress Committee which would be something like its Central

Legislature, and a small cabinet called the Working Committee would function as the Executive.

Gandhiji gave the Congress not only a constitution, but also a directive principle. Originally a reformist organization, the Congress began to cultivate a revolutionary outlook, especially on account of the intrusion of Extremists like Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose. Revolutionary idealism cannot altogether eschew violence, but Gandhiji was a revolutionary with a difference. Under his leadership the Congress became firmly wedded to non-violence. Subject to this restriction, Gandhiji permitted opposition to his views; his Congress accommodated the Swarajists and had room enough also for Marx-oriented Socialists who formed a party—the C.S.P.—within its fold. But they could not make much of an impact because they were not well organized; some of them could not fully endorse Gandhiji's non-violence, while the rightists sensed that with his hatred of exploitation and inequality Gandhiji in his own way was a socialist too. The leading Congress Socialist, Jayaprakash Narayan, was at one time drawn towards the idea of a violent disruption of the British Raj, though he ended up as a Sarvodaya leader, that is to say, as an exponent of non-violent Gandhian socialism. Of the Swarajists Chittaranjan Das died shortly after founding the party, and Srinivasa Iyengar retired from active politics, largely, it seems, because of personal differences. It was said in the twenties that it was the son's radical views that converted Motilal Nehru to aggressive politics, but the shrewd lawyer must also have realized that Mahatma Gandhi was getting increasingly fond of his son's volatile intransigence and basic pliability and that Gandhi's bandwaggon was the most cushy berth for him. Only Vithalbhai Patel stood out as an unrepentant Extremist, but he too was taken ill and died in a foreign country; and although he was an exceptionally able man, he had no following even remotely comparable to Gandhi's.

So Gandhi was the Congress and the Congress was Gandhi. Ordinary people may deceive others, but saints are apt to deceive themselves. Gandhiji deceived himself by thinking that those who clung to him had been converted by his religion of *ahimsa* whereas, in fact, they were attracted to him partly by his magnetic personality and partly by the patriotic desire for service to the country, but to a large extent by the consciousness



that this was the best way to political advancement. And they all feared that if he stood aloof as well he might, the ground would vanish from under their feet. So Gandhiji had no difficulty in imposing his will upon a group of hand-picked men who passed off as the Congress High Command and who allowed their personalities to be eclipsed in the hope that one day they would reap much more benefit for themselves than they could expect from any other source. They, too, were patriots, but patriots with a difference.

Mahatma Gandhi was a traditionalist who wanted to effect a moral regeneration from within. The land, according to him, belonged to Gopal, another name for Lord Krishna (God), and the landlord must regard himself as a trustee; and in this way he was inclined to tolerate feudalism, capitalism and even imperialism. But this approach was criticized and resented by radicals who wanted to uproot the old order. So inside the Gandhi Congress too, there was a Right and a Left. But this was only shadow-boxing, because Gandhi dominated the Congress and chose the President whose election was a formal affair. There were some trusted persons—Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Jamunlal Bajaj—who would always figure on the Working Committee, and there were other 'yes' men also, such as Gobindaballav Pant, who were readily available to serve. From year to year, although there were changes here and there, the same caravan marched on. The result was that men with divergent views could not get in, and members of the 'homogeneous' cabinet lost the power of independent thinking and the capacity for initiating decisive action. But they were attached to one another 'as thick as leaves'. They sometimes aired their differences, and so did Mahatma Gandhi himself, but for them it was play-acting while in the Mahatma it was a symptom of self-deception. When publicly nominating Jawaharlal as his successor, Gandhiji said that although there were differences between them, after he was gone Jawaharlal would speak his (the Mahatma's) language. Even when Mahatmaji was alive, Jawaharlal only fretted and fumed and then toed the line chalked out by the leader. A believer in moral conversion, Mahatmaji thought that he had converted Jawaharlal who, however, remained stationary.

There was a good deal of play-acting with occasional doses of unctuous hypocrisy. It was in a letter to Sardar Patel—Jawaharlal's most probable rival—in September 1934 that the Mahatma first indicated his preference for Jawaharlal as the rightful 'helmsman' of the Congress organization.<sup>51</sup> Soon after he recommended Jawaharlal as President of the 1936 Congress session. After becoming President, Jawaharlal Nehru delivered speeches in a socialistic vein and appointed a Working Committee containing two members of the Socialist group along with the Old Guard—Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad and others—who took offence at some 'unsatisfactory declarations' made by the President to whom they sent in their resignations. This was on 30 June 1936, but the next day, that is, on 1 July 1936, Rajendra Prasad wrote to say that after a long conversation with Mahatmaji, they had decided to revoke their resignations, and the earlier letter was to be taken as not having been written at all!<sup>52</sup> Vallabhbhai, the 'man of iron', should have stood his ground, but he too was a man of ambition, and was, in fact, well looked after, for although Jawaharlal remained President, Patel became Chairman of the Parliamentary Board which, after the formation of the Congress ministries, was the custodian of power and patronage. Rajagopalachari became Chief Minister of Madras and Govindaballav Pant, who was to be a leading member of the High Command, of U.P. No one in this coterie was closer to Gandhiji than Patel, and no one knew better than he of Gandhiji's partiality for Jawaharlal. In view of this, Vallabhbhai's admonition to Jawaharlal about speaking harshly to the old man of seventy-one (letter No. 268 dt 3.7.1938) sounds somewhat mawkish.

### III

It was in 1939, three years after the Lucknow Congress at which Jawaharlal was firmly entrenched as the 'helmsman', that these members of the Working Committee again had differences with the President, Subhaschandra Bose, who, however, did not enjoy Gandhiji's support. Rather, after his election Gandhiji, who had sponsored Pattabhi Sitaramayya, went on record as saying, 'the defeat is mine'. On this occasion, the High

Command—the Nehru–Patel Axis—acted very differently—and very curiously. At first they did not come out into the open but employed one of their prime henchmen, Govindaballav Pant, to move a resolution in the A.I.C.C., in which the axis had an assured majority, that on account of the critical situation then prevailing in the country and hence the continuing necessity for Gandhiji's leadership and also on account of the 'aspersions' cast—it was not said by whom—the President be requested to form the Working Committee in consultation with Gandhiji, who, it may be recalled, had formally ceased to be a member of the Congress. It is a sordid story of which the details would not bear retelling. Suffice it to say that Gandhi did not agree to give the advice which the elected President Subhaschandra Bose was asked to seek from him. Instead Mahatmaji introduced a new phrase that the Working Committee should be 'homogeneous'. But none raised the question why Mahatmaji did not object when Pant moved his resolution, nor why he had not spoken of the necessity for a 'homogeneous' cabinet when canvassing for Pattabhi. The upshot was that Subhaschandra, baffled by Pant's resolution and Gandhiji's reluctance to proffer advice, resigned as President, and Rajendra Prasad stepped into his shoes. In view of the fact that the President had been elected by an electoral college spread all over India and Mahatmaji whose leadership was invoked was not a member of the Congress, Rajendra Prasad's acceptance of the vacant office appeared to be odd, and the awkwardness of this appointment was not lost upon Jawaharlal. When Rajendra Prasad formed his Working Committee and the Old Guard returned *en bloc*, Jawaharlal stayed away along with Saratchandra Bose and Subhaschandra Bose. But he had not to pine in the wilderness for long; Abul Kalam Azad, who became President in 1940, said, 'I brought back Jawaharlal and added Shri Rajagopalachari . . .'

All was well that ended well. But one question remains. Jawaharlal Nehru said in his Presidential address at the Lucknow session of the Congress (1936): 'Sixteen years ago, under the inspiration of our leader, we took a new and long step, converting [this] Congress from an ineffective body, feebly functioning among the upper classes, into a powerful democratic organization with its roots in the Indian soil and the vast masses

who live on it.'<sup>53</sup> Was this ouster of a duly elected President a democratic exercise backed by the vast masses who live on the Indian soil?

The men who engineered the ouster were all of the upper classes and were amply rewarded by the vast masses on behalf of whom they held power, first in the Congress and then in the Government. Govindaballav Pant, who had obediently moved the resolution, had already been Chief Minister of U.P. and returned to the job on the transfer of power in 1947, but he did not stay in U.P. for long. Uncharitable critics say that one of the minor causes of Congress-League friction was Sardar Patel's longing for the Home portfolio in the Central cabinet. Soon after Patel's 'untimely death'—an admiring biographer's phrase—at the age of seventy-five, Pant was called to Delhi to shoulder the burden of the Home office, which he held until his own untimely death at the age of seventy-four! Rajendra Prasad, who unabashedly stepped into the vacancy to which another person had been duly elected, became a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, then President of the Constituent Assembly, after which he took over the Presidentship of the newly established Indian Republic from Governor-General Rajagopalachari (1950), and continued to serve the country with singular tenacity. He was elected to this high office in 1952 and, amidst murmurs of disapproval, got a second term in 1957. In the meantime, the philosopher Vice-President, it was rumoured, had become restive, and the President finally retired in 1962. A cardiac patient for a long time, he died a few months after quitting office.

#### IV

I shall now come to the trio who were in the running for the succession to the Prime Ministership—Chakraborti Rajagopalachari, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Of these Rajaji was a lightweight, and I think he knew it. A South Indian, he was outside the Hindi belt and thus would, in one important respect, be an unsafe custodian of one of Mahatmaji's 'fads'. The Sardar was in firm control of the party organization and as Chairman of the Parliamentary Board, was the fountain-head of power and patronage. But he knew also that from 1934

Mahatmaji's eyes had been fixed on Jawaharlal who was publicly renominated in 1942. In sorrow and anger Mahatmaji said in 1947, '... the taste for power has turned their heads',<sup>54</sup> thereby indicting all the top men in the Congress. The race, as he must have known very well, had started much earlier, and Rajaji had probably staked his claims first. Even before the arrival of the Cripps Mission, he went to the length of saying repeatedly that the Muslim League demand for separation should be accepted by the Congress so that a National Government—where, incidentally, he was bound to have a place—might be immediately established at the Centre. Could opportunism be more blatant?<sup>55</sup>

No wonder that as soon as a settlement was reached and then power was actually transferred, Rajaji found a number of jobs waiting for him. He was a member of the Viceroy's Interim Executive Council in 1946, Governor of West Bengal in 1947, and Governor-General of India from 1948 to 1950. Then after the inauguration of the Republic, he became a Central minister in 1951–52 and then returned to Madras as Chief Minister in 1952–54. When the Congress had nothing more to offer, he left it to form the Swarajya Party.

The real contenders for the succession were Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru, both of whom had, thanks to Mahatmaji's blessings, been advertised perhaps much beyond their deserts. Churchill's scathing comment is much nearer the truth than Mahatmaji's biased estimate. Patel had been associated with Mahatmaji in the Kheda Satyagraha, but Mahatmaji himself was not enthusiastic about it, and he even called it a Himalayan miscalculation, though he used the phrase more particularly about the volunteer organization than about the movement itself. Neither did Patel distinguish himself in the Non-cooperation agitation in which he devoted himself more to constructive work than to Khilafat propaganda, which, if only Mahatmaji saw things in the right perspective, should have been described as an Olympian blunder. Patel did not come into the limelight until the Bardoli Satyagraha, which, according to Morarji Desai, was a triumph not only of 80,000 peasants but more particularly of Vallabhbhai personally.<sup>56</sup>

An apostle of *ahimsa*, Mahatmaji had a somewhat unreasoning partiality for every movement that abjured violence, and in

this way his support tended to magnify minor episodes into epic struggles and small men into giants. From a commonsense point of view the Bardoli Satyagraha was a local agrarian agitation with no relevance to the country's fight for independence; the issue was merely a rent dispute and the result achieved no more than a suspension of excess assessment until an enquiry was made. When Nariman, who later on received harsh, almost brutal, treatment from Patel, extolled its 'magnitude' and magnificence, the celebrated Bengali novelist Saratchandra Chatterji made a caustic comment at a Youth Conference at Rangpore (now in Bangladesh) which deserves to be quoted at some length: 'Mr Nariman has repeatedly told us that at Bardoli the Imperial sceptre has been dashed to pieces on the ground. In shame the British lion does not dare raise its head. . . . I would tell you what actually happened. The peasants said, "Please, Sirs, our one rupee rent has been doubled. It's too exorbitant. Please enquire and verify." "No", answered the thoughtless bureaucrats; "first pay at the enhanced rate, and then we'll enquire." The peasants won't agree. Then the leaders gathered there and assured Government that it was not a political matter at all but a revenue dispute. Still Government won't listen. Then minor official pressure was magnified into repression, and this was followed by a terrible hue and cry, a rush of leaders big and small, a gala feast for assembled journalists; lakhs and lakhs of rupees flowed to Bardoli, and the mighty struggle stopped only when Government were fully satisfied that the peasants were not agitating for the disruption of the British Raj but only for an "enquiry", and if possible, some reduction in rent. In Bengal never mistake such petty concessions for mighty achievements, neither must you confuse fiscal disputes with political struggles . . .' (translated from the Bengali original).

This minor agitation and its trumpery sequel helped inflate Vallabhbhai's vanity, and his power and prestige grew by leaps and bounds. As I have said, in 1936, with the help of Rajendra Prasad and a few others he tried to unseat Jawaharlal Nehru but failed. He, however, secured the Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Board and then made Nariman his first target. Both belonged to what was then the Bombay Presidency, and as Nariman was immensely popular locally, Vallabhbhai would

not bear a brother near the throne. So Nariman had to make room for the relatively insignificant B. G. Kher. Here let Maulana Azad speak: 'In Bombay, Mr Nariman was the acknowledged leader of the local Congress . . . there was general expectation that Mr Nariman would be asked to lead it [the Provincial Government] in view of his status and record . . . Sardar Patel and his colleagues did not like Nariman and the result was that Mr B. G. Kher became the first Chief Minister of Bombay. Since Nariman was a Parsi and Kher a Hindu, this led to wide speculation that Nariman had been bypassed on communal grounds. Even if this is not true, it is difficult to disprove such an allegation.' Later on Azad admits that the bypassing of Nariman was 'a lapse' that went to discredit the Congress.<sup>57</sup>

Maulana Azad, being himself a player, did not see the game as clearly as a spectator might. Patel said that his colleagues, meaning the other members of the Board, were as much responsible as he, and dragged in Jawaharlal too, thereby unmasking both the Chairman of the Parliamentary Board and the President of the Congress. After the elections the new members of the Provincial Assembly chose Nariman as their leader. This was a correct move—in theory and in accordance with recognized practice. But Patel and Nehru—although often at loggerheads—were at one in their greed for power. Referring to the elected members' nomination of Nariman for the Chief Ministership, Patel wrote to Jawaharlal, 'This is too bad. It is in direct contravention of your instructions issued in this behalf. . . . *Unless stronger control from the Centre is exercised, things will go wrong*'<sup>58</sup> (italics mine). Does not this smack of authoritarianism, or 'democratic centralism'?

After firmly entrenching himself as the Chairman of the Parliamentary Board, Sardar Patel looked for fresh worlds to conquer, and what could be more attractive than the large area covered by the princely states? A good deal of fulsome adulation has been showered on him for the ability displayed in integrating these states in the Union of India. J. R. Wood refers to those who argued that the princes did not matter much because once India rid herself of British rule, the princes would capitulate—'like apples from a tree when the trunk is shaken', adding that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel often voiced this view,

which suggested practical wisdom.<sup>59</sup> Seen in this perspective, Vallabhbhai's handling of the Rajkot Satyagraha, which he started and concluded in 1939 and which was advertised as a great triumph, needs to be examined with some care, because the episode belongs to a time when the Paramount Power seemed to be secure in its saddle, and Sardar Patel's capacity for handling of a complex problem was really tested.

Rajkot was a small state in the Western Indian States Agency of which the town of Rajkot was the capital, that is to say, the seat of the Resident. This partly accounted for its importance which was enhanced by its connexion with Mahatmaji who had passed his early years in this place, because his father was the Dewan or Prime Minister of Rajkot. Lakhajiraj who was a progressive ruler—his title was Thakore Saheb—died in February 1930, leaving his son and heir Dharmendra, a scapegrace and the despair of the Political Service. On being invested with full powers in 1931, young Dharmendra who constantly wanted money for his debaucheries negated his father's benevolent reforms, creating discontent among all sections of the people. Vallabhbhai Patel chose Rajkot as the proper centre for initiating political Satyagraha in the states, and the Government, right up to the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, who was determined to stamp out any flicker of sedition, also took it up as a test case. The struggle which had started in 1936 reached its climax by the end of 1938 when the Thakore Saheb and his Durbar climbed down and plumped for a settlement, which was arrived at during Christmas week. This alerted the authorities and after feverish consultations between the local British officials and the Viceroy, it was decided that the Thakore Saheb would modify the agreement of which the main item was the appointment of a ten-member Reforms Committee to which Sardar Patel would nominate seven members, and this Committee would recommend the transfer of as much power to the people as was consistent with the Prince's obligations to the Paramount Power and his own prerogatives.

When the Sardar made his seven nominations, the Prince rejected four of them on the ground that all classes of his subjects, notably Rajputs, Muslims and Depressed classes, had not been represented and that U. N. Dhebar, whom the Sardar had



tipped for the Presidentship of the Committee, was not, strictly speaking, a man of Rajkot at all. The Sardar considered this a breach of promise and resumed his Satyagraha which was reinforced by the intervention of Gandhiji, who conceded the claims of Rajputs and Muslims. But after personally visiting Rajkot, where he heard tales of official atrocities and also saw evidence of such atrocities in jails, he suddenly announced on 27 February 1939 that he would undertake a fast unto death unless the original agreement with Sardar Patel was restored. Things moved very quickly now and the Viceroy referred the question to the Chief Justice of India, Sir Maurice Gwyer, who upheld the inviolability of the original agreement, apparently leaving no alternative to the Thakore Saheb. Gandhiji broke his fast and the news of the award was flashed by Congress propaganda machinery as a signal triumph for Sardar Patel, the prospective architect of the integration of princely states.

That Gandhiji broke his fast and his life was saved was a relief to the people of India and a weight off the Viceroy's shoulders also. But otherwise the entire exercise ended in a fiasco. Rajputs and Muslims held black flag demonstrations, arguing that if their representatives were not taken, Gandhiji would be guilty of breach of faith, and all-India minority leaders like Jinnah and Ambedkar also were in the field, espousing the cause of their communities. The result was an ignominious defeat. Mahatmaji himself renounced the Chief Justice's award, apologized to all—the Thakore Saheb, his adviser, the Resident, and the Viceroy, and admitted that his fast was a mistake. So the agreement went by the board, the British lion shook his mane again and the Sardar was proved a paper tiger—a man of straw!

## V

When in 1946 Winston Churchill spoke contemptuously of the men to whom power was being transferred he must have had Jawaharlal Nehru especially in mind. Jawaharlal was not only an old Harrovian like himself, a Cambridge-man, and a member of the English Bar but also the most publicized Indian politician, whom Churchill had heard of and disliked. I re-

member having read an essay written during the war years by Harold Laski, complaining that anybody opposed to Jawaharlal was to Churchill an expert on Indian affairs!

At this stage it may be worth while considering Jawaharlal's credentials—his sacrifices and services in the cause of Indian freedom, which began, I think, with his attendance at the Congress Session of 1919 held at Amritsar. He was then a barrister of seven years' standing but it does not seem that he had any practice worth speaking of, and he himself admits that he had lost interest in the profession. Everybody who has any acquaintance with law must have seen that all its ambiguities and tortuosities stem from a striving after precision of thought and language, and Jawaharlal Nehru, a lover of fine phrases but incapable of precise thinking, was not the man for this profession. So, it may be contended, he did not give up a lucrative practice as his father, C. R. Das, and others did. Neither did he resign a comfortable job in the manner of Subhaschandra Bose, H. V. Kamath or Dr Praphullachandra Ghose. He sacrificed a profession that did not suit him.

Much has been said about his eleven prison sentences which were painful when one remembers their effect on his family life. His *Autobiography*, not an outstanding piece of writing, is remarkable for two portraits—his father who is in the forefront, an impressive, imposing, forbidding person but loving and lovable, and his wife who is very much in the background, frail, tender, unobtrusive, affectionate but for long spells separated from her husband and then struck down by a fatal illness which she bore with patience and without complaint. But if this aspect is left out of account, Jawaharlal's prison life, except for a brief spell in Nabha, was not without its compensations. It restricted his freedom of movement but gave him leisure to write out about three thousand printed pages, which nobody could do unless he had his accustomed comforts and a plentiful supply of books. His own books had splendid sales, thank. largely, I believe, to publicity and propaganda. I shall not be surprised if I am told that the royalties from his books exceeded the salaries he drew for eighteen years—first as Member of the Governor-General's Executive Council and then as Prime Minister. It will not be relevant now to go into the merits of these books, but one thing is certain: such books, involving

leisurely study and elaborate references, could not have been written in the Nabha jail of 1923 or in any other place where the amenities and facilities of civilized life were not within easy reach.

In spite of his long association with Gandhiji and with the Congress, of which next to Gandhi he was the topmost leader, Jawaharlal seems to have had a very imperfect idea of the fundamental problems before him and his party. In any struggle, the first requisite is a knowledge of the opponent's strategy and resources. In the nineteenth century the British authorities had to face the uprising of 1857, which they put down with the help of their army, and their loyal subjects whom they rewarded handsomely. Then from 1885 there was the Congress agitation which, although constitutional, was unpalatable to Anglo-Indian officialdom. Now a new weapon suggested itself to the authorities—driving a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims. Although well-known, the story is worth repeating, because one of our greatest leaders seems to have been unaware of it. Bengal was partitioned into two halves so that there might be a Muslim-majority province and the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia might be deprived of a common platform. It was in East Bengal, a Muslim-majority area, that the idea of the Muslim League was mooted; it was at M.A.O. College, Aligarh that the plan of a Muslim deputation to Lord Minto was conceived and finalized, and the main demand of this deputation was separate electorates. The designing Secretary of State, Lord Morley, disavowed any intention of creating representative institutions, but he did introduce the principle of representation with separate electorates—only to create discord between Hindus and Muslims. As has been shown with some elaboration in the preceding chapter, the introduction of 'separate electorates' was the objective aimed at by the Secretary of State and the Viceroy, and the 'reforms' only an ornamental appendage. The experience of twenty years showed that the poison had worked, and intending to administer another dose of it, Ramsay Macdonald suggested a division of Hindus, of which a clear hint had been given in Birkenhead's letter to Lord Irwin asking him to rely on co-operating Muslims and 'the depressed community'.<sup>60</sup> It was Gandhiji's historic fast of 1932 that not only preserved the integrity of the Hindu community but also some

kind of a united India minus Pakistan. Yet Jawaharlal Nehru, differing here from the entire body of nationalist India, felt distressed and 'annoyed' with Mahatmaji for 'choosing a *side-issue* for his final sacrifice—*just a question of electorate*'<sup>61</sup> (italics mine).

What, Jawaharlal thought at this moment, would be the result of the final movement? The question is intriguing and also suggestive, for it shows his ignorance of the realities of Indian politics and also a total incapacity for taking any initiative. This almost puerile dependence on Gandhiji lasted right up to 1946, and that is why whenever he thought or acted on his own later on, he wobbled and bungled. In common with many others, Jawaharlal was not happy about the suspension of the Non-cooperation movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident in 1922, but he tamely concludes that Gandhiji's decision might be right, though not the manner of putting it into effect.<sup>62</sup> Further, after discussing the proposals subsequently put forward by Chittaranjan Das and others he says more frankly, 'But it was quite immaterial what other individuals thought in the matter, as ultimately Gandhiji's view was bound to prevail.'<sup>63</sup> So he, for one, spared himself the trouble of thinking and also got his reward for sustained intellectual indolence. In 1929 Gandhiji was requested to take over the Congress Presidentship, but he held back, and at the last moment, when there was no time for a regular election, put forward Jawaharlal's name which the A.I.C.C. accepted. Although Jawaharlal was the nominal President at this session, it was Mahatmaji who controlled the proceedings; he even made out and read out the list of members of the Working Committee, significantly omitting the names of Subhaschandra Bose and Srinivasa Iyengar.<sup>64</sup> After this there was the Civil Disobedience movement which ended with Gandhiji's signing an agreement with the Viceroy on 4 March 1931. Part of the agreement was galling to Jawaharlal, but his comment is very characteristic of a man who was a 'boggler ever', 'There is nothing more to be said.'<sup>65</sup> Once the leader had signed, they must keep quiet.

This most salient feature of Jawaharlal's character—incapacity for independent thinking—made him a prisoner of phrases and a pliable instrument in the hands of other people. Maulana Azad, his best 'friend and comrade', refers to the 1937 elections in which Jinnah's Muslim League had fared badly in the

Muslim-majority provinces, but done well in Bombay and U.P. For the bungling of the Bengal situation to which reference has been made in the preceding chapter, the Old Guard must be held jointly responsible, for all its members must have been equally allergic to Sarat Bose, elder brother of Subhas. But Jawaharlal alone was responsible for mishandling the U.P. situation, which Maulana Azad had managed adroitly by offering two Cabinet seats to the Muslims, and here was an opportunity for weaning these legislators from Jinnah's leading strings. But Jawaharlal, who was often jokingly dubbed a 'nationalist Muslim', proved adamant and said that the League should be satisfied with only one seat; otherwise no coalition was admissible. Here, if Azad's version is to be accepted, the thinking was done by Purshottamdas Tandon.<sup>66</sup>

The Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934 by a group of Congressmen who looked to Jawaharlal Nehru for support, though he himself did not join it—an ambivalence quite characteristic. Most people are converted to socialism by a study of Marx's *Capital*, as Bernard Shaw was, but he says, 'Marxism is not only useless but also disastrous as a guide to the practice of government . . . as Lenin very soon found out and very frankly confessed.'<sup>67</sup> It is not enough to express admiration for socialism, but a socialist must express clearly what he means by it in theory and practice. In his *Autobiography*, Jawaharlal seems to have reservations about Gandhiji's policies and programmes, because they would not take us very far towards the fulfilment of 'socialist objectives'. Why then did he not join the C.S.P.? Expressing his feelings around 1933-34, he is frankly enthusiastic about the Russian experiment, but there is no evidence, then or afterwards, that he had any close acquaintance with Russian socialism; neither, I believe, had he any opportunity of assessing it, for he could not wish away what Goebbels and, later on, Churchill called the Iron Curtain. He often expressed admiration for the Marxist analysis of history, but overlooked the fact that Marx's faith that the transition from capitalism to communism is inevitable is irreconcilable with his call to the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist order by violent means. If the transition be inevitable, it would come of itself, and a new phoenix would at the right moment rise out of the ashes of the old. Yet it was by means of a civil war that Lenin rode to power,

and it was not by pacific methods that he and his successors retained it. This application of violent methods, Jawaharlal himself says in the concluding reflections in the *Autobiography*, is repugnant to a man of liberal principles, and that is why he is a socialist rather than a communist. In the *Autobiography*, the nearest he comes to defining his socialism is when he visualizes a world 'with a controlled production and distribution of wealth for the public good'.<sup>68</sup> In this context, he expresses his preference for the communist system to what he saw prevailing in England and America. But did the public ever control production and distribution in the Russia of Lenin? Here is Shaw's estimate: 'In Russia a minority of devoted Marxists maintain by sheer force such government as is possible in the teeth of an intensely recalcitrant peasantry.'<sup>69</sup>

In 1936 Jawaharlal Nehru delivered an aggressively socialistic Presidential address where he gave a more detailed outline of his socialism, which he later on practised for seventeen years from 1947 till his death in 1964. In the *Autobiography* he confessed that he did not understand the Marxist theory of value, but in the Presidential address of 1936 he used the term 'socialism' in the scientific, economic sense, as an instrument of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, as also the vested interests in land and industry, and thus socialism stands for a transformation of the entire social structure. Private profit should be eliminated, and retained, if at all, in a 'restricted sense' and the profit system replaced 'by a higher ideal of co-operative service'. Socialism, according to him, may be established by the full democratic process provided, of course, the full democratic process is available. When he speaks of restricting private profit through the higher ideal of co-operative service, he does not speak like a 'scientific socialist' but like a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi whose only instrument of establishing a new order was moral conversion. What then does Jawaharlal mean by 'the full democratic process'? Communist Russia calls itself a Union of 'Socialist Republics', having dropped the epithet 'democratic' when Leninists broke away from the Social Democrats. Yet East Germany, a Russian protégé, prefers the adjective 'democratic' and so does China, which nowadays abuses Russia as imperialist. In an angry retort to Subhas Bose, Jawaharlal says that it is difficult to draw the line between a socialist and an

individualist.<sup>70</sup> That is very true. In real life there is neither an absolute despot nor an absolute democrat, just as there is nowhere a perfect circle or a perfect straight line. Yet there are pronounced tendencies; a democrat aims at providing for maximum individual freedom and a totalitarian at the establishment of maximum order, discipline, uniformity. Adopting Shaw's words, we may say that there are men—Jawaharlal was a prominent specimen—who, when they commend or condemn people, would use epithets like 'Socialists, Bolsheviks . . . on the one side, and Capitalists, Imperialists, Fascists . . . on the other, none of them having an idea of the meaning of these words clear enough to be called without flattery the ghost of a notion.'<sup>71</sup>

By 1936, within less than twenty years of the October Revolution, Jawaharlal had acquired full faith in the economic theory underlying the Russian social structure, and he was impressed by the remarkable progress made by the Russians—economically, educationally, culturally and in other ways. He had come to believe in rapid industrialization which would help end unemployment and eliminate poverty. But he hated violence on which the system then prevailing in India was based as also the violent methods used in Russia. To avoid misunderstanding, he even discarded the word 'communism' in favour of 'socialism'. His preference was for peaceful democratic methods, for he was as passionately dedicated to democracy as to socialism. In 1936 he was not sure of the intermediate steps that would have to be taken and of the crises to be faced. But he was sure of the goals, which, however, were conceived only in terms of clichés and catchwords, taken partly from the Marxists and partly from Mahatma Gandhi.

Eleven years later he was installed in power which he retained for seventeen years—more than twice the span allowed to Lenin. Within a few months he was the undisputed leader, for Subhas Bose did not come back, Sardar Patel was reconciled to a subordinate position, and Mahatmajī was dead. And the spectacle of India—free, democratic, socialist India—is like a Greek tragedy with its beginning, middle and end complete; we have to compress seventeen years into a day and concentrate our attention on Tin Murti Bhavan, South Block and Parliament House—all in New Delhi—as one place. Nehru wanted public control of production and elimination of the profit

motive, and the large public undertakings, with their enormous losses, bear testimony to the achievement of his objective. He is alleged to have said that when he got power, he would hang every blackmarketeer from the nearest lamp-post. He was responsible for economic policies that spawned hoarders, smugglers and blackmarketeers too numerous to mention. At least he never mentioned his proposed punishment again. He believed in industrialization, in establishing heavy industries, in planning, and the large powers that he exercised enabled him to indulge his fads and fancies. Big industries grew up in all parts of India, but this solved neither the problem of unemployment nor the problem of poverty. It is claimed that India is one of the first ten industrialized countries of the world, but carping critics would say that it is also one of the poorest. I am not enough of an economist to be able to assess the correctness of either estimate, but nobody can make any mistake about the distance between the millions of starvelings and the handful of rich men at the top who became richer than they had been before the advent of what is called the Nehru era.

On the eve of his resignation from the Congress, Gandhiji issued on 17 October 1934 a lengthy statement in course of which he said, 'Corruption and hypocrisy ought not to be the inevitable products of democracy, as they are today. Nor is bulk a true test of democracy.' Would not the Mahatma have made the same comment on the democracy Nehru raised in India after the Master's death?



## ‘Deshgourab’ Subhaschandra Bose

I do not want to minimize the contributions of Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjea, Gopalkrishna Gokhale, Balgangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai or Chittaranjan Das. But I have claimed that the two greatest figures in the history of the Indian National Congress are Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Subhaschandra Bose.

Yet no two men could be more unlike. Mahatmaji started as a loyalist and a co-operator who was forced by circumstances to tread the path of Satyagraha or passive resistance. Subhaschandra, on the other hand, was temperamentally a revolutionary. A knowledgeable friend, whom I have called ‘N.C.M.’, thinks that Jatin Mukherji’s fighting a pitched battle with a British military contingent at Balasore a few miles from Cuttack, Subhaschandra’s second home, must have made a strong impact on the young undergraduate yet in his teens. That confrontation took place on 9 September 1915. A few months later Subhaschandra was expelled from Presidency College for directing a students’ strike that culminated in an assault on a professor—an Englishman—who habitually traduced Indians. The expulsion was a great blow. Yet there was another side to it. ‘My Principal’, Subhas wrote in his unfinished *Autobiography*, ‘had expelled me, but he had made my future career . . . I had developed self-confidence as well as initiative . . . I had a foretaste of leadership—though in a restricted sphere . . . I had acquired character and could face the future with equanimity.’<sup>72</sup> Although a barrister, Mahatmaji never attended an institution like Presidency College, Calcutta or the University of Cambridge, and he lived his philosophy rather than deduce it from books. Those who inspired him—Ruskin, Thoreau and Tolstoy—were moralists rather than professional philosophers, and he

himself gave an explanation of the philosophy of the *Gita* which runs counter not only to the ordinary acceptance of its teachings but also to the commentary of learned men like Balgangadhar Tilak and others. His doctrine of *ahimsa* had been preached two thousand five hundred years ago by the Lord Buddha, but although Mahatmaji refers to the Buddha in his *Autobiography*, he speaks of the Buddha's renunciation and compassion without bothering about Buddhistic philosophy. Not so Subhaschandra whose instincts were sustained by scholarship and meditation. A brilliant student who passed high in the Indian Civil Service Examination in the short period of nine months or so, he made philosophy his special subject of study both at Calcutta University and at Cambridge, and after sustained meditations on different philosophies from Samkara's Theory of Maya, or the World as Illusion, to the evolutionary philosophy of Spencer, Hartmann and Bergson, he found sustenance in Hegelianism, which he thus sums up in the concluding sentence of his *Autobiography*: 'Reality, therefore, is Spirit, the essence of which is Love, gradually unfolding itself in an eternal play of conflicting forces and their solutions.'<sup>73</sup> Life's movement is dialectic and there is conflict at the very centre of it. Mahatmaji also believed in the primacy of the Spirit, the essence of which is Love, but he would argue, if he considered this a matter of argument at all, that if the essence of the spirit is Love, it also excluded the possibility of conflict, but it might include divergence that was capable of being bridged by moral conversion.

When Subhaschandra sailed for England in September 1919, he had, thanks to press censorship, no idea of the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, but when after resigning from the I.C.S. he reached India in July 1921, Non-cooperation was in full swing, and the first thing that he did on landing at Bombay was to call on Mahatmaji to get a clear conception of his plan of action. A small item of this episode is worth recounting. He had asked the supreme leader, among other things, how mere civil disobedience could force the Government to retire and to give India freedom. Would the boycott movement create so much distress in Lancashire that the British Government would be under pressure to make peace with India? The Mahatma said in effect that he had not thought out the matter in that way at all. Subhaschandra was then puzzled about what could be the sense of

what Mahatmaji said, but later on he realized that Mahatmaji had expected a change of heart; in other words, he had faith in his own power of moral conversion. That is an argument which a Hegelian, firmly convinced about a dialectical conflict between opposed forces, could not appreciate, and thus from the beginning Subhas had his doubts about the Mahatma's comprehensive doctrine of non-violence, which ill accorded with his own Hegelianism. His earlier contacts and activities, particularly the affair at Presidency College which led to his expulsion, were also not encouraging if looked at from the Gandhian point of view. He himself has written that the decision to send him to England for the Civil Service Examination, which was only a few months away, had been suddenly taken. I was a junior student—quite a 'fresher'—at Presidency College when news of his success reached student circles there towards the end of 1920 or early in 1921. I still remember the impact it made on old students of the college or on students who had just passed out but would drop in of an evening at the old college hostel. Non-cooperation was then very much in the air, but these old acquaintances of Subhaschandra seemed to be patriots of an earlier era, the era of Anushilan and Jugantar, and their reaction, as far as I could gather, might be expressed through Browning's famous line, 'Just for a handful of silver he left us'. Their disappointment was short-lived, for news soon arrived that Subhaschandra had resigned, and he became a national hero overnight.

If Subhaschandra was disappointed by his first meeting with Gandhiji, it might be partly due to his earlier contacts which had given him an idea of a different kind of freedom struggle, not of 'spinning' one's way to Swaraj. Mahatmaji directed him to see Chittaranjan Das who had just then given up his princely practice at the Bar and was leading the Non-cooperation movement in Bengal. The introduction to Das was a refreshing contrast to the young revolutionary's experience in Bombay. Here was a man who really meant opposition, confrontation, and although he had accepted Gandhiji's Non-cooperation programme at Nagpur, he gave primacy to active opposition, of which he was to draw up his own programme about two years later when he formed the Swarajya Party. For the present he asked Subhaschandra to organize the boycott of the Prince of

Wales who was to land at Bombay on 17 November 1921. Chittaranjan, better known as Deshbandhu, made the 'hartal' a great success; it was said that nowhere else, not in Bombay or Delhi, was the response so complete. Subhaschandra was now given important assignments. A National College was started at Wellington Square of which he became the Principal. His first important public function was somewhat unpalatable, but he carried it out with unflinching conviction. When the upsurge of Non-cooperation was at its crest, Rabindranath Tagore dealt a blow to the movement—it was possibly a salutary shock—by delivering a lecture on the mingling of cultures, aimed obviously at the programme of the boycott of educational institutions affiliated to Government-recognized universities. Principal Subhaschandra Bose invited the celebrated novelist Saratchandra to speak at the newly founded National College on the conflict of cultures as a counterblast to the poet's advocacy on behalf of western education. When the Swarajists captured the Calcutta Corporation under the new Municipal Act, Deshbandhu Das became the first Mayor, and he made Subhas the Chief Executive Officer—a post that should be earmarked for a very senior member of the Indian Civil Service, and Subhas was only twenty-seven. The young C.E.O. took up his new duties in right earnest and made many improvements and innovations in the municipal affairs of what was then India's largest and most densely populated city, but in course of a few months he, along with some other members of the party, was arrested on 25 October 1924, and after a brief detention in a Calcutta jail, he was transferred to Burma from where he was released after about three years—in May 1927.

## II

The three years from 1921 to 1924—packed with varied activities and experiences and filled equally with exhilaration and disappointment—mark a watershed in Subhaschandra's life. In 1925 he heard in Mandalay jail the news of the death of his leader Deshbandhu Chittaranjan, whose last speech—at the Provincial Conference held at Faridpore—had been something of a shock to a follower spoiling for a fight. When Subhaschandra emerged out of prison, he was sick in body but mature

in mind and a leader in his own right. Even during 1921-24 his mind had begun to move in different directions but they all pointed to one goal—the disruption, by whatever means or methods, of the British Government in India.

His account of the Indian struggle—partly an autobiography and partly a history—which is remarkable for its clarity and incisiveness is a contrast to Mahatma's *Autobiography*, in which the freedom movement is only a part of his many experiments with truth, and Lloyd George's broken promise about Turkey is more important than General Dyer's atrocities at Amritsar. The first point to note about Bose's political maturity is a growing disillusionment about Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>74</sup> It is on record that Gandhiji said to Irwin that Subhas was his 'opponent' who might 'denounce' him.<sup>75</sup> It was indeed so because the two men were not of the same stuff, though both aimed at and helped achieve the same goal—Indian Independence, and neither would approve of the fragmentation of the country into different units. But Mahatma Gandhi was essentially a co-operator who, in 1919, appealed to Tilak to work the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, launched the Non-cooperation movement in 1920 primarily to promote Hindu-Muslim unity, a laudable but non-political objective, and declared in 1921 that if he got Dominion Status, he would fly the Union Jack on all his *ashrams*!<sup>76</sup>

In 1922 Gandhiji called off the movement on the ground that some people had resorted to violence in a place called Chauri-Chaura! Who had heard the name before? Could any leader think that in a movement, generally non-violent but spreading over a subcontinent, not a single act of violence would be perpetrated anywhere? Subhaschandra called this withdrawal an anti-climax, and critics of Gandhiji have thrown out more sinister suggestions. The British Government did not take Gandhi seriously in 1921, and their officials and supporters must have had a hearty laugh. Events would prove them wrong, for Gandhi would re-emerge on the political scene with renewed support and prestige and prove more and more difficult to handle. But that is another matter. For the present it was openly alleged that because Swaraj then '[stood] not within the prospect of belief', the Chauri-Chaura affair came as a very handy excuse for beating a retreat. Subhaschandra refers to a report that

as Gandhiji was planning a no-rent campaign at Bardoli, Government had in secret made elaborate arrangements to torpedo it, having collected in advance the instalment of rent that would fall due later.<sup>77</sup> It is to the eternal credit of Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru that on coming out of prison they organized the Swarajist party within the Congress and kept the fire burning.

Subhaschandra had some illuminating comments to make on Mahatmaji's handling of Hindu-Muslim unity for which he cared as much as the Mahatma, but his approach and outlook were different. The two leaders were equally anxious to seek the support of the great Muslim minority for the cause of Swaraj, which must be the goal of all Indians—Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis as well as Hindus. But political revolution, thought Subhas, must be delinked from religion as it must be delinked from every other consideration. The dedication must be total and unconditional. The Muslims had already an organization of their own, the Muslim League, which was interested in securing jobs, reservations in Legislatures and other sectarian advantages, and that is why it could be weaned away by the highest bidder—normally, the British Government. Gandhiji in effect offered Indian Muslims the bait of Hindu support for Khilafat when Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, had broken his promises to them. Then with Khilafat Committees flourishing everywhere, the Muslim League had a lean existence, its membership dwindling to 1,097 and its funds to Rs. 1,681. After the abolition of the Khilafat, the Muslim League, again with British patronage, gathered strength under Jinnah's leadership. In Subhas Bose's view, if Mahatmaji, with his undisputed authority, had not allowed the Khilafat Committees to grow up independently but recruited the non-cooperating Muslims as members of the Congress, they would have been imbued with the spirit of nationalism and a sizable section would, in all probability, have stuck to the Congress, which would have been able to negotiate with the British Government and Jinnah's communalism from a position of strength.<sup>78</sup>

That this is not an idle fantasy or an ill-founded speculation was proved by Subhaschandra Bose two decades later when as the head of the Azad Hind Fauz he fought his way through in-

credible impediments to the gates of India. On that fateful occasion not only a large part of his army but also a number of his intimate associates were Muslims. He had only one Indian companion—Abid Hasan—when he made the perilous, three-month-long journey from Berlin to Tokyo, his Chief of Staff was Major-General Shah Nawaz Khan, and the man with whom he attempted his last-known journey from Taiwan was Habibur Rahman. Ready to assume office after release from Ahmadnagar Fort, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote on 29 December 1945, 'The story of the Indian National Army, formed in Burma and Malaya . . . spread suddenly throughout the country . . . they became the symbols of India fighting for her freedom. They became also the symbols of unity among the various religious groups in India, for Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and Christian were all represented in that army. They had solved the communal problem, and so why should not we do so?'<sup>79</sup> Otherwise so voluble, Jawaharlal here displays great economy of words and also innocence very naïve. This miracle was due to the personality of one man, and his name was Subhaschandra Bose. A decade later V. P. Menon somewhat caustically pointed out that some of the I.N.A. men assisted the tribal and Pakistani invaders of Kashmir,<sup>80</sup> but Menon should have known that it was due to the maladroitness of the national problem by his own bosses that some Indian Muslims had to choose Pakistan as their homeland. Did he expect them to act as fifth columnists there?

It is not merely the abrupt suspension of the Non-cooperation movement but also the apparent success of constructive work which filled Subhaschandra's mind with dissatisfaction and set him thinking about his future programme of action. For about a year, including two months of detention in Calcutta when he was permitted to do his official duties, he was the chief executive of Calcutta Corporation, devoting much of his time and energy to municipal work. But he also made the discovery that such constructive work, useful as it is, blunts the edge of revolutionary ardour. So he thought that the first task before a subject nation is political revolution, and a true patriot must think of nothing else so long as he has not made his country free.

## III

A more important conviction that dawned on Subhaschandra Bose during these years and deepened as time passed by was that Mahatmaji's non-violent method, which depended on negotiation, really strove after compromise rather than independence. As a dedicated revolutionary, he wanted complete freedom for India to be achieved by non-violent means, if possible, and through violence, if necessary. An armed revolutionary in an unarmed colonial country must belong to a secret society, and the very basis of a secret society is that it cannot give publicity to its activities until the objective is attained. Subhaschandra's record of the Indian struggle written before the attainment of freedom is incomplete in one respect. It does not say anything about his contacts with these 'Extremists', though there are illuminating clues here and there, and even if he himself never came back to complete his autobiography, we can reconstruct the portrait with the help of available sources—written and oral. His attitude to violent revolutionary activity was like the attitude of Tilak who, basing his political views on the *Gita*, said that every act is justifiable provided it is performed with detachment and without any personal gain in view.

I have already said that Subhaschandra Bose had sympathy for and possibly contacts with armed revolutionaries even before his departure for England in September 1919. When he returned to India and joined the non-violent Non-cooperation movement under Mahatma Gandhi and Deshbandhu Das, the revolutionary leaders of Bengal, who during the war years were interned under the Defence of India Act, had been released, and they might have resumed their activities all at once. But Gandhiji and Deshbandhu urged that non-violence should be given a chance and the Mahatma promised Swaraj within a year. Subhaschandra himself speaks of a closed door meeting between these men and all-India leaders of Non-cooperation in Deshbandhu's house.<sup>81</sup> It is presumed that the revolutionaries promised to give Mahatmaji the time he wanted, but they also kept themselves ready for action, and it would not be going too far to infer that there was from this time a growing intimacy between them and Subhaschandra Bose. This intimacy came to the surface in 1923-24 when, after the suspension of the Non-



cooperation movement in 1922, the revolutionary leaders were released from their promise to Gandhiji, and it was at about this time, when revolutionary activity was resumed, that the parties regrouped themselves under the supreme leadership of Subhaschandra, who now took the place of Jatin Mukherji. Bagha Jatin's mantle had first fallen on Dr Jadugopal Mukherji, but after being externed from Bengal, the doctor settled down at Ranchi as a medical practitioner. As Jadugopal had not been able to do anything tangible after Jatin Mukherji's martyrdom, there was, I believe, a general feeling, shared also by Jadugopal himself, and certainly by Hem Ghose, who was allergic to Jadugopal, that the supreme command should now go to Subhaschandra.

There were two open manifestations that the armed revolutionaries were astir after 1922 and that Subhaschandra was gradually assuming control of these men. Government sensed this revival too and placed many of the leaders behind prison bars in 1923. On 12 January 1924 there was a great sensation in Calcutta when Gopinath Saha, a young man in his early twenties, shot dead an Englishman named Ernest Day, mistaking him for the ruthless Police official, Charles Tegart. Politically, a more important development was that the Bengal Provincial Conference in June 1924, while reaffirming its faith in non-violence, passed a resolution appreciating Gopinath's ideal of self-sacrifice, which the Conference respected. Three weeks later Deshbandhu Das went a step further and moved a similar resolution at the A.I.C.C., which rejected it by 78 to 70 votes. The large size of the minority vote showed the diminishing confidence of Congressmen in Mahatmaji's ideal of non-violence. As Deshbandhu himself was at this time veering round to compromise, the voting at the provincial level and the national shows that in both these places the voice was the voice of Chittaranjan, but the hand was the hand of Subhaschandra. Another overt piece of evidence is the publication in 1926 of *Pather Dabi*, which Saratchandra wrote on the basis of materials supplied by Hemchandra Ghose, the founder of Mukti Sangha or its offspring B.V., with which Subhaschandra was to remain connected till the last stage of his extraordinary career. Although one could catch an occasional glimpse of Dr Jadugopal Mukherji or Rashbihari Bose in the novel, *Sabyasachi*, its hero,

who is unswervingly committed to the violent disruption of the British Empire in India, is undoubtedly an artist's portrait of Subhaschandra Bose. That was definitely the impression I gathered from a long discussion with the novelist on the significance of the novel.

#### IV

For Gandhiji *ahimsa* or non-violence was the breath of his being, and it was only to be expected that at this stage he and Subhaschandra would agree to differ. Subhaschandra valued the support of the masses secured by Gandhiji, but he wanted to divert this support to a different kind of freedom struggle. Whether it was quite proper for Subhas to use in his own way an institution that Gandhiji had committed to non-violence is a question that might justifiably be raised, and Gandhiji might be well within his rights to try to save the Congress from invasion by an exponent of violence. But that is a plea which cannot be advanced by British imperialists who had established their empire by force and fraud and were trying to retain it by oppression and chicanery, neither by those who had not Gandhiji's limitless courage, his unsullied faith in non-violence or his tremendous will-power and who prospered only by basking in the sunshine of Gandhiji's favour. Such a man was Jawaharlal Nehru who denounced armed revolutionaries as fascists who goaded the British rulers to use fascist methods,<sup>82</sup> as if otherwise they would govern in a benevolent and humane way.

Fascism has now become a fashionable word of abuse. Men accustomed to loose thinking and imprecise expression would apply the epithet to anything that was opposed to them. Unscrupulous politicians would swear by fascism when fascist methods suited their purposes and would abuse their opponents as fascists whenever they met with any opposition to their views or ways. Jawaharlal Nehru's notions of political ideologies were often coloured by his emotions and his sympathies and this made him on many occasions an unfair critic and an unreliable judge of national and international affairs. He condemned Nazism and Fascism but preferred Russian Communism, though both Fascism and Communism used violent methods and were equally authoritarian. He was also a pro-

fessed nationalist, though Communism is, at least in theory, international. He seems to be sceptical about the so-called philosophical background of Fascism, of a corporate state with private property preserved but curtailed. But he does not give reasons for his scepticism, and when he assumed power, it is such a national state where vested interests and profiteering were sought to be curbed but not broken that he tried to establish. Only he replaced old vested interests by new and bungled the experiment. He made a dig at Subhaschandra Bose,<sup>83</sup> who, he said, was in 1938 against giving any support to China or doing anything against Germany and Japan who were aggressive, which was Nehru's chief grouse against Fascism. The accepted definition of Fascism is that it was a militant movement opposed to Socialism and Communism. That is how Mussolini expounded it, though later on communists had no scruples in entering into a pact with nazis and fascists. When Nehru was engaged in a war with Communist China twenty-four years later, who was fascist—Communist China or her enemy? Was German aggression against Czechoslovakia or Poland before the Second World War more violent than the Russian stranglehold on these countries after it?

In *Glimpses of World History*, Nehru makes scathing attacks on Fascism, emphasizing its lack of ideology, its use of violence, its authoritarianism which throttled dissent, citing, in the manner of Marxist propagandists, the murder of Giacomo Matteoti, a powerful socialist critic of Fascism and Mussolini. It was alleged that Cesare Rossi, an intimate of Mussolini, had committed the murder with Mussolini's knowledge in 1924. Mussolini at once relinquished the Home portfolio, transferring it to a member of the other party in the coalition; there was a full enquiry, all the suspects including Cesare Rossi were arrested and those found guilty of complicity were punished, though complaints were made that the sentences were somewhat light. 'An anti-Fascist enquiry of 1947 laid the blame on extremists over whom Mussolini had no control and who may have intended to beat up Matteoti rather than kill him',<sup>84</sup> which probably explained the light sentences.

Compare the above with the fate of Syamaprasad Mookerjee, a member of Nehru's first cabinet from which he walked over to the Opposition, and then with his superior dialectical skill daily

battered the Prime Minister in parliamentary debates. For the rest let Balraj Madhok, himself a distinguished political leader, speak: 'When he elected to visit Jammu in May 1953 . . . , the Government of India first decided to arrest him and then allowed him to enter the State to be arrested there so that the Supreme Court of India, which till then had no jurisdiction over Jammu and Kashmir State, might not set him free. It was part of a conspiracy to remove him from the earthly scene. The way he died as a *prisoner and the refusal of Pandit Nehru to hold an enquiry* in spite of the universal demand for it strengthened the doubts that he did not die a natural death' (*D.N.B.*, III, italics mine). The account given above carries its own commentary.\*

Nehru's statements on what, following him, we may call terroristic activity or terrorism in Bengal is a farrago of confusions and show a total lack of understanding. One has only to scrutinize these statements—made mostly in the *Autobiography*—to notice their contradictions, their lack of realism and their irrelevance to the true significance of the freedom struggle. At one moment their importance compared with normal Congress activities is so little that he would ignore them except for the loud noise they make and also for the obstacles such violence throws in the way of peaceful direct activities (p. 276). He also says that terrorism had been condemned from many points of view, but he does not specify these many points of view nor who the critics were except Gandhiji and the Government, and he does not cite any instance of a revolution that was non-violent. Many old terrorists have indeed abjured this path, as many non-cooperators also became co-operators. In spite of his assertion that terrorism is an insignificant phenomenon, confined, according to him, mostly to Bengal, it is the support of these revolutionaries and their leftist sympathizers that contributed largely to the election of their leader Subhaschandra Bose as President of the Congress, whereas Jawaharlal always became President as Gandhiji's nominee, the first time entering the high office by a 'trap-door' (p. 194). Not finding any 'political significance' in the terrorist movement, he even supports Government's repressive policies: 'Any Government faced by terrorist acts is bound to combat them and try to suppress them' (p. 482).

\* A detailed account of the sordid episode is given in *Syama Prasad Mookerjee: His Death in Detention*, written by his mother Jogamaya Debi (1955).

All the same, he condemned the Government for the firing on detenus in Hijli Detention Camp in 1932 and also for the false communique issued by the Bengal Government on the subject (pp. 313-14). He detected a 'fascist outlook' in the terrorists (p. 315), and when he came to Calcutta in 1934, he found 'fascist tendencies much in evidence' (p. 482), having noticed earlier a conflict between nationalist-fascism and imperialist-fascism (p. 315); but he says, too, that fascism cannot spread in India in the European sense so long as there is a foreign government (p. 591). Then why does he introduce the word so often without explaining anywhere what he means by it—in the European sense or Indian? He makes a strange confession when he says, 'I am full of violence myself, and, consciously or unconsciously, I am often attempting to coerce others.' And if coercion is the argument against fascism, then what would he say of 'the psychic coercion by which Gandhiji *reduced* many of his intimate followers and colleagues to a state of pulp?' (p. 539, *italics mine*). As I read these comments and also compare them with Nehru's reflections on socialism, I am reminded of Milton's famous description:

Yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible.

Before taking leave of these so-called 'fascist-terrorists', I should add a few words on Jawaharlal Nehru's references to Chandrasekhar Azad (*Autobiography*, pp. 261, 262), which I have read more than once, with pain. Nehru believed that terrorism was waning and it was not of much significance politically. He was welcome to his beliefs and his 'discoveries', especially when such beliefs suited both his tastes and his interests. But the fact remains that terrorists were very much active in the thirties, and their greatest triumph was achieved when in 1940-41 the B.V. of Calcutta and the Kirti-Kisan Party in far-off Lahore managed, through their concerted efforts, to send Subhaschandra out of India as a prelude to the greatest confrontation Indian revolutionaries had with British imperialism after 1857. Chandrasekhar Azad's is one of the most revered names in the freedom struggle, the title 'Azad' being a popular tribute to this 'hero of a hundred fights'! Even on the eve of his final encounter with the police at Allahabad on 27

February 1931, in which after a desperate fight with the enemy he spent his last bullet to kill himself, Azad, as is well known, was trying to organize his Republican Army. But Jawaharlal Nehru says that at about this time Azad called on him and spoke words of recantation and pined for social rehabilitation. I do not know how many persons have taken or would take Jawaharlal's words at their face value. But I feel that in such a situation he should not have named the valiant soldier of freedom in this manner when the man was no longer alive to contradict the alleged recantation or to give his own version of the interview.

## V

I make no apology for inserting the above digression, for one of the objectives of the present narrative is to draw a distinction between these heroic soldiers who paved the way to freedom with sacrifice, suffering and blood and our arm-chair generals who trod the primrose path of inconsequential discussion and mostly futile negotiation to snatch the fruits of freedom for themselves and their immediate followers.

Like King Charles's head in Mr Dick's applications, the word fascism must always appear in Jawaharlal's writings—and seldom with a precise meaning. That fascism was an anathema to him does not prove his credentials as a true exponent of socialism. He concludes his unconvincing account of his interview with Chandrasekhar Azad with the observation: '... they did not think of terrorism as they used to. Many of them, it seems to me, have definitely the fascist mentality.' How to reconcile two such sentences passes my understanding. By contrast Subhaschandra Bose's attitude was refreshingly simple and clear. We must wage 'an uncompromising struggle with the British', he said, for winning Indian independence, for which 'all possible means should be employed and the Indian people should not be hampered by any philosophical notions like Gandhian non-violence or any sentimentalism like Nehru's anti-Axis foreign policy.'<sup>85</sup> His particular objection to Gandhi's leadership was that being wedded to non-violence, it contemplated a compromise with the British for the solution of the Indian problem—one might add, for all problems, even when

the party at the other end is egregiously in the wrong. This is the truth which was dawning upon him when he was working for Swaraj as a Congress worker, and it developed into a clear-cut philosophy when he spent three years in Mandalay prison.

After release from prison, which the police resisted till the last moment, he found himself fully occupied. He was in Calcutta—a free man—on 15 May 1927, and very soon in the thick of momentous events. The British Government announced the appointment of the Simon Commission in 1927, and Indian opinion took it as a challenge to the ability of Indians to draw up an agreed constitution. Various conferences were held in 1927–28 with the same end in view, and early in 1928, possibly at the instance of Dr Ansari, President of the Madras Congress (1927), a ten-member Committee was appointed with Motilal Nehru as Chairman and with Subhas Bose as one of its members. This Committee was expected to submit a report to be considered primarily by the Congress in 1928 and also by the All-Parties Conference which had taken the initiative. The contents of the report need not detain us here. What is important in the present context is the impact it made on Subhaschandra Bose who was connected with it at all stages. He felt that although the report contained valuable suggestions, the entire exercise was not only unnecessary but counter-productive. The basic problem was to wrest independence from the British, and it is those who would join the struggle and achieve this objective that had the right to frame the constitution of free India, for they alone possessed the correct perspective.<sup>86</sup> Others were interlopers and representatives of mushroom parties, who crowd an All-Parties Conference only to queer the pitch. Another danger of thus putting the cart before the horse, that is to say, of devising a constitution for free India before India was free, was that the British might make use of these interlopers to delay the attainment of freedom or mangle it in the process of transferring power. It seems that in arriving at this conclusion Subhaschandra had particularly in mind M. A. Jinnah and the Muslim League, for they had stood aloof from the Non-cooperation movement, had hobnobbed with the Government and were then making absurd claims to strengthen the hands of the third party.

Subhaschandra Bose was disappointed with the Congress

session of 1928, which ended somewhat tamely advocating acceptance of Dominion Status rather than putting forward a demand for Independence, but he had also an exhilarating experience. He found that his old associates—notably Hemchandra Ghose and Satyaranjan Bakshi—had during his absence built up a strong cadre of well-trained volunteers—now christened Bengal Volunteers or the B.V.—who were ready for action, and during the session Subhaschandra rode at the head of this band of trained volunteers as their G.O.C. He had already outgrown his faith in the two main principles of Gandhian revolution—non-violence and constructive work—and the revolutionary leader now had also a revolutionary army.

Subhaschandra's resilience received a further impetus a year later when, under Nehru's presidentship, the Independence Resolution was passed at Lahore. Gandhiji, however, seemed to tone down the force of this resolution by defining what he called the 'substance of Independence' through an Eleven Points programme. Both President Jawaharlal Nehru<sup>87</sup> and Subhaschandra Bose<sup>88</sup>, who was now the acknowledged leader of the leftists, were puzzled, because the Eleven Points did not contain even a whiff of political revolution. Another objection raised by Subhaschandra Bose was that they were not socialistic; in fact, he said that they would be acceptable to any Indian capitalist. However, as Government did not accept the Eleven Points programme, Mahatmaji launched his Civil Disobedience movement which aroused great enthusiasm, and except for a brief lull during which Gandhiji attended the Second Round Table Conference in 1931, the movement continued with unabated vigour till May 1933 when Gandhiji decided to devote himself entirely to Harijan work (uplift of the Depressed Classes). Subhaschandra, who had been arrested in February 1932 and detained in prison since then, was released in 1933 to enable him to proceed to Vienna for treatment. Vithalbhai Patel had already been there for some time, receiving medical treatment, and shocked at Gandhiji's action, the two leaders issued a statement condemning it. Subhas Bose also addressed a meeting in London, protesting against Gandhi's action as total surrender and denouncing British imperialism in India, which, according to him, depended on 'the naked sword'. Jawaharlal Nehru too



felt that Gandhiji's action practically killed the movement,<sup>89</sup> but did not disapprove of it. The difference between fulminating subservience and determined opposition was not lost upon genuine leftists.

It is necessary to point out here that Gandhiji's Eleven Points programme was neither unsocialistic nor apolitical. Socialism, primarily an economic concept, has been defined by various writers in various ways. The greatest common measure would be a slight modification of the theory propounded by one of its leading exponents—George Bernard Shaw, who defines it as absolute equality of income. In this imperfect world we cannot in actual practice achieve absolute equality of income any more than we can draw a line that is absolutely straight. A good beginning might be made with reducing by half the enormous military budget and the fat salaries of highly paid officials, and that is what Gandhiji demanded.

The programme, addressed to a British Viceroy, was not intended to curb Indian capitalist interests which Gandhiji would like to control by his theory of trusteeship and in other ways, but it was certainly intended to hit British trading interests. Neither was the programme apolitical. If the C.I.D. and the issue of licences for arms were brought under popular control, the British stranglehold, even if it survived these and other changes, would be greatly weakened. Later on the Congress resolved to fix the salaries of ministers at Rs. 500 a month so that their emoluments, even with the 'perks' so often sneered at by Western critics, did not amount to a fifth of the salaries of the Members of the Governor's Executive Council whom they would replace. This was a definite step towards reducing the gap between higher and lower incomes, and if Gandhiji had lived longer and had his way, the profits of capitalists would have been clipped too. It may not be irrelevant to point out here that 'Comrade' M. R. Masani is inclined to give an affirmative answer to the question: 'Is Gandhi a Socialist?',<sup>90</sup> and Masani was not less knowledgeable about socialism than either Jawaharlal or Subhaschandra.

Neither was Subhaschandra, who was far away from the scene, right in calling the suspension an anti-climax. Every spurt of Gandhiji's passive resistance advanced the country on the road to independence, and in spite of all their bluff and

bluster, the rulers manifestly looked weaker and felt more and more isolated in the land they were supposed to govern. Subhaschandra himself recognized this when he surveyed the twenties and thirties in retrospect in 1943: 'During the last twenty-two years, the Congress under the Mahatma's leadership has built up a powerful organization . . . the masses of India have learnt to strike at the powerful enemy . . . The younger generation in India has, however, learnt . . . that while passive resistance can hold up or paralyse a foreign administration—it cannot overthrow or expel it, without the use of physical force. . . . The last stage will come when active resistance will develop into an armed revolution.'<sup>91</sup>

## VI

During his stay in Europe between 1933 and 1936 Subhaschandra made contacts with different people in different countries, and having better foresight than Neville Chamberlain he felt sure that a war was in the offing, and that Britain would lose the war, thus making it possible for India to gain her independence. In the second calculation he was at the same time both wrong and right, for Britain won the war and yet lost her empire, and the first to go was Britain's most important asset—India.

In a sense the outstanding event in India during the thirties was Gandhiji's suspension of mass Civil Disobedience followed by his formal withdrawal from the Congress. At the Bombay session held in October 1934 he resigned from the Congress because he wanted 'complete detachment and absolute freedom of action'. It is difficult to judge Gandhiji by our ordinary standards, for although he resigned even his four-anna membership of the Congress, he remained the supreme leader as before. It was he who made Jawaharlal the 'helmsman' of the Congress, nominating him as President at its Lucknow and Faizpur sessions held in 1936, and it was he who drafted the formula when in March 1937 Congress decided to accept office on the understanding that Governors would not exercise their special powers of interference.

Yet there were simmerings of discontent against Gandhiji's

leadership, because this leadership, which slanted towards compromise, was neither 'radical' in its outlook nor 'militant' in its methods. Subhaschandra Bose and Vithalbhai Patel condemned it in 1933, and in 1934 the Congress Socialist Party was formed. It was quite characteristic of Jawaharlal Nehru that he blessed the C.S.P., included two Socialists in the Working Committee, but he himself did not join the new party. The Communist Party was banned and many communists were imprisoned in the Meerut Conspiracy Case in 1933, but communist propaganda went on unabated, deriving its strength partly from foreign inspiration and partly from disillusionment with Gandhi's revivalist, non-violent, moderate outlook.

The other side, relying on reactionary and divisive forces, was not idle either. In 1934-35 Jinnah returned from England to resume leadership of the Muslim League, supposedly at the request of Liaquat Ali Khan, but that was only make-believe. A Khaksar volunteer made an attempt on Jinnah's life, saying that 'he was a tool in the hands of British Imperialism',<sup>92</sup> and Jinnah's activities, starting with his Fourteen Points to his demand for a corridor—policed by British soldiers—bear testimony to the would-be assassin's allegation. In this progress his principal collaborator was Lord Linlithgow, apparently a well-meaning aristocrat but really a deep-designing politician, who during a long tenure of more than six years did his best to put the Muslim League on a parity with the Congress. It was in 1936 that Lord Linlithgow arrived in India as His Majesty's representative. It was in 1936, again, that along with His Majesty's Viceroy, India also received His Majesty's most seditious Indian subject—Subhaschandra Bose, who started from Vienna defying a Government ban and was arrested as soon as he landed at Bombay in April. He was released about a year later in March 1937. Mahatma Gandhi visited him in their Calcutta house where he stayed for a few days, and ailing Rabindranath also came to meet the distinguished guest. Soon Subhaschandra heard, while on a short visit to Vienna, that he had been elected President of the next Congress (1938) to be held at Haripura. This was quite characteristic of the Mahatma—his infinite faith in his capacity for moral conversion, a sample of a moralist's egotism and an egotist's short-sightedness. He

had converted Jawaharlal Nehru and he thought he would be able to convert Subhaschandra Bose; only he did not know that Subhaschandra was made of sterner stuff.

The Mahatma made a more grievous mistake when he handled this problem a year later. Having failed to convert Subhaschandra, who was tough enough to announce that he would stand again, Mahatmaji now turned to Maulana Azad who declined the offer. The Mahatma's choice next fell on Patabhi Sitaramayya, whose official *History of the Congress*, a monument of clumsy thought and clumsy expression, is evidence of his unsuitability for this high office. The selection of such a man for such a post showed how unimportant the position had become for the Dictator, and the fact that Mahatmaji pitted this undistinguished man against Subhaschandra Bose shows, as 'N.C.M.' tells me, how the realities of the Indian situation had gone out of the Mahatma's focus. The rest of the story is well known and has even become irrelevant. The Bombay session of the Congress (1934) had taken away the power of appointing the Working Committee from the A.I.C.C. and vested it in the President. But Govindaballav Pant brought forward a resolution in the A.I.C.C. that the Working Committee should be appointed by the new President—Subhaschandra Bose—in consultation with Gandhiji, who later on declined to be consulted on the ground that the Working Committee, which should be 'homogeneous', must not be formed by means of such consultation. Did he not know of the Pant Resolution when it was moved in the A.I.C.C. and then at the open session at Tripuri? After a few months of controversy and correspondence, the President had to go and the Congress was saved from an invader. It was good for the Old Guard as well as for Subhaschandra Bose, who could explore a new avenue for service, sacrifice and the attainment of immortality. But as one looks at the episode after a lapse of four decades, one cannot get away from the painful impression that here Mahatmaji was not experimenting with truth.

In view of the Pant resolution carried at the open session of the Congress at Tripuri, Gandhiji's attitude of non-cooperation, and the refusal of the Old Guard to co-operate with the new President, Subhaschandra had no alternative but to resign. In his Presidential address at Tripuri, which was brief but to the

point, he clearly laid down that the British should be given a six months' ultimatum to quit, and if, as was to be expected, they refused, a mass movement with a comprehensive programme should be launched with a view to driving them out. After Subhaschandra Bose's enforced resignation in May 1939, there were demonstrations by his supporters which were unpalatable to the new authorities, and they expelled him for three years from the Presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Committee. In *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal writes somewhat pontifically, 'He then attacked Congress policy publicly and, early in August 1939, the Congress Executive took the unusual step of taking disciplinary action against him, who was an ex-President.'<sup>93</sup> While writing this, Jawaharlal must have forgotten the co-existence in the Congress since the twenties of majorities and minorities, both openly airing their views and taking independent lines of action, as was done by the Swarajists and no-changers, and he must also have forgotten the emergence of the C.S.P. which was professedly hostile to the majority. Neither does he care to mention the well-reasoned letter which Subhas Bose wrote to the new President, who had asked for an explanation. Rabindranath Tagore, who had earlier called Gandhiji Mahatma ('Great-souled'), now hailed Subhas as Deshgourab ('Country's Pride'). The next session of the Congress (1940), of which Maulana Azad was the President, was held at Ramgarh but it was outshone by Subhas Bose's Anti-Compromise Rally organized at the same time and the same place. This partial eclipse of Gandhiji's Congress was a pointer to a new trend in Indian politics. Much water had flowed in the Indian rivers during the two decades from 1920 to 1940.

In July 1940 Subhaschandra was arrested and detained in prison. Grave crimes were hinted at, but he was not sent up for trial on the plea that a public trial would not be in the public interest! In jail Subhaschandra was completely immobilized, while the world outside was moving fast, and he could realize even in the solitude of his prison that the World War would soon reach a critical stage with all the major powers locked in a mortal conflict. He was very much dissatisfied with the Congress which was boggling about non-violence and undecided whether to support British democracy or to challenge British imperialism, as if the two could be separated. He must be free if he were

to seize the tide in international affairs at the flood, and he thought out a plan not only of getting out of prison but also of getting out of India. He went on hunger strike and successfully resisted artificial feeding. The Government at first ignored his intransigence, but took alarm on the seventh day of the fast, for if a front-rank leader like him starved himself to death while in detention, the repercussions both in India and abroad would be more serious than the Government, locked in a global war, would be willing to face. He was, therefore, released in December and allowed to live in his own house, but he would not be permitted to receive any visitor and Government would maintain strict surveillance. Forty days after his release, one night in January 1941, he slipped out of his house—and then out of India.

## The Road to Freedom- The First Phase

The Tripuri session of the Congress was held in March 1939, and the Second World War began in September. The Old Guard of the Congress, who seemed to think that their immediate duty was done with securing Subhaschandra's virtual expulsion from the august body, were now faced with a problem: 'To be or not to be, that *was* the question.'<sup>94</sup> Locked in barren discussions, they came to the formidable conclusion that they could offer their assistance to the Government in return for 'a recognition of Indian freedom and the establishment of a National Government at the Centre'. They issued a statement on 17 September, and Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad even saw His Excellency the Viceroy, who was stiff and cold and promised nothing. All that the Working Committee could do after prolonged deliberations was to ask the Congress ministries to resign, and on 8 November the ministries did resign. What next? These people who had lost the capacity for independent thinking and taking decisive action found themselves in a hopeless quandary.

Once again Gandhiji thought and decided for the Working Committee, on this occasion by launching his movement of individual Satyagraha. At first the Government did not take it very seriously, but the British authorities had underestimated the strength of Gandhi's hold on the masses. Very unobtrusively the jails were crowded with prisoners, and ruthless oppression only added to the dimension of the resistance. Jawaharlal Nehru was awarded a four years' jail sentence for delivering a speech supposedly seditious, and Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress President, was incarcerated, as he himself half-humorously remarks, even before he had had a chance of offering Satyagraha. It is

not so much the topmost leaders that mattered; the size of the movement, in which there were no leaders but only followers, made it formidable. Although at first it was decided that only a few chosen volunteers would offer Satyagraha, the number began to swell, and soon, as Jawaharlal Nehru notes, there were several thousand prisoners who, with or without permission from the Congress High Command, had broken some law and courted imprisonment. More noticeable than the steady onrush of law-breakers who were punished was Government's fear of the frail half-clad leader who had inspired them and whom till then the rulers were afraid to touch.

The significance of this straggling mass of Satyagrahis or passive resisters proceeding on their own to join the movement is missed even by Maulana Azad, who felt embarrassed about one Sampuram Singh, an unauthorized Satyagrahi of Punjab. Sampuram Singh made the mistake of offering a defence. This was not in accordance with Gandhian principle and the Magistrate by imposing a fine of one anna, which he paid from his own pocket, made the whole affair look somewhat ridiculous. What Maulana Azad fails to notice is that it is the opposition of these ignorant masses who derived inspiration from Gandhiji without understanding his theories that played a considerable part in persuading the British to quit India, for even Lord Linlithgow admitted that the presence of the British was 'obnoxious' alike to Muslims and to Hindus.

## II

Although dogs barked and were put into the kennel, the imperial caravan moved on, and would continue to move on. So thought Winston Churchill and other diehard Conservatives, and so thought their chosen representative, Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy of India from 1936 to 1943, whose principal weapon was appeasement of Jinnah. It is not without significance that soon after the commencement of hostilities in Europe, Jinnah elaborated his two-nation theory and formulated his demand for Pakistan at the Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940. Jinnah did not bother himself about promoting the war effort. Although a good percentage of fighters in the Indian army were Muslims—the majority, I believe, Punjabi Muslims



—not a single soldier had been recruited by Jinnah's efforts, and the label of the Punjab Government—'Unionist'—was itself a rejoinder to Jinnah's separatist theory. Yet, as after his European visit in 1928 and his later English sojourn which ended with the finalization of the Government of India Act of 1935, at this time, too, he knew that whatever the outcome of the War or of the Indo-British negotiations, his cue was to step up his demands. Writing about the turn of events a few years later, Michael Edwardes comments, 'The Muslim League's demands for partition grew louder and louder, and the phrases it used were larded freely with threats. The government was remarkably forbearing, for the speeches of the League leaders were undeniably incitements to communal violence.'<sup>95</sup>

After the passing of the Pakistan resolution in March 1940, Jinnah behaved as if he was the sole representative of Muslims and the ruler of a separate state that had already been formed. Lord Linlithgow, who seemed to have been waiting for the passing of this resolution as his predecessor Lord Minto had waited for the Aga Khan Deputation in 1906, then asked Gandhi and Jinnah to see him at Simla. One Diwan Chamanlal is said to have shuttled between them to promote a meeting, but it did not come off. Poets are prophets in more senses than one. Did Shakespeare draw a portrait of Diwan Chamanlal more than three hundred years before his birth in Osrice who shuttled between Laertes and Hamlet and whom Horatio called a water-fly?

Jinnah's purpose had been served. Henceforth Britain would deal with two men—one the opposite number of the other—and they were Jinnah and Gandhi. Jinnah now put up his 'Tentative Proposals' to Lord Linlithgow who sent a long-winded reply which Jinnah's biographer thus sums up: 'The long, cautious phrases of the Viceroy's pledge meant, simply, that Britain would not withdraw from India and leave the Muslims to the mercy of the Hindus.'<sup>96</sup> Later on Jinnah was emboldened to administer a rebuke to the Viceroy who had formed the National Defence Council without consulting him. He must have told Linlithgow something on the lines of what he wrote in a letter to Major W. H. Gardiner on 26 July 1941: '... I must say that it was highly improper on the part of the Viceroy, holding the position he does, to have canvassed the Muslim

League Premiers and other Muslin Leaguers . . . behind the back of the leader and the Executive . . .'<sup>97</sup> At that time Fazlul Haq was Chief Minister of Bengal, Sikander Hyat Khan of Punjab, Allah Bux of Sind, and not one of them was a member of the Muslim League. Saadullah of Assam was, it is true, a Leaguer but in the Assam Assembly the Muslim League had only 9 seats, and Muslims a total of 34 in a house of 108 members. What Jinnah wanted was that he should nominate all the Muslim members on central and provincial bodies, and that was a condition which, the Viceroy pointed out, it was not 'constitutionally' possible for him to fulfil. But he pocketed Jinnah's rebuke and proceeded to pamper his protégé more and more.

### III

From all this scrambling and squabbling one man kept aloof, and that man was Subhaschandra Bose. At the beginning of the War, Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress, jointly and severally, decided not to embarrass the British Government when Britain was engaged in a deadly struggle for survival. Subhaschandra's conscience was not so delicate; rather he thought that England's predicament was India's opportunity, and instead of helping in Britain's war efforts India should range herself on the side of Britain's enemies to make her own freedom more assured. As for the Congress proposal about the formation of a National Government for the duration of the war, he must have been amused by it, because that was exactly what he had demanded at the Tripuri Congress, calling his demand an 'ultimatum', but the High Command then seemed more anxious to oust Subhaschandra Bose than to win freedom or instal a National Government. He knew very well that the British were not in 'the giving vein', war or no war; neither had he any sympathy for the politics of mendicancy. And he had even less sympathy for Jinnah, who wanted to raise a Muslim nation out of the sufferings of people who were not his followers. India had carried on the fight for freedom with the help of Muslims—from Ashfequllah to Abul Kalam Azad—when such help was available, and if Muslims stood aloof from the freedom struggle, Hindus should accept that aloofness with equanimity.

Subhaschandra was always inclined to ignore Jinnah whom he regarded as an ally and agent of imperialism. Although he had followed the lead of Gandhi for more than fifteen years, he was feeling for some time past that he must throw off the shackles of Gandhian pacifism in the face of an impending war which he, more than any other Indian politician, foresaw clearly. His first plan seems to have been to capture the Congress, wean it away from Gandhi's pacifism and use the organization as a base for an anti-British onslaught. He welcomed his first election to Congress Presidentship in 1938 and saw that if Gandhi had a large following, his own following might soon be larger. Here, too, he was only partly correct in his calculations. Although the Kisans, the workers, and the revolutionaries were with him, the solid phalanx of the top leadership was opposed to him, and early in 1939, on 29 April to be exact, he had to resign his Presidentship. He now proceeded to form a new party on the basis of the massive support he sensed he had in Bengal and outside Bengal. There was a solid cadre of 'freedom-intoxicated' patriots under Hemchandra Ghose, ably assisted by Satyaranjan Bakshi. A north-Indian tour in 1938 when he was Congress President enabled him to make contacts with different groups of determined revolutionaries who had two points in common—an unflinching, uncompromising dedication to the cause of Indian independence and complete disillusionment with Gandhian non-violence. Sardar Sardul Singh Cavcesher, the oldest of these revolutionaries, aptly described their point of view when he somewhat sarcastically described Gandhiji as the greatest policeman who guarded the British officers and their interests in India!<sup>98</sup> Subhas had had earlier contacts with north-Indian revolutionaries through his own lieutenant, 'Major' Jatin Das, who was connected with Bhagat Singh, Bhagawaticharan, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Chandrasekhar Azad and others. They had gone, but their successors, who had taken up the torch lit by the Naw Jawan Bharat Sabha and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army, were committed to the violent overthrow of British imperialism and the establishment of a socialist order which would guarantee the rights of the people in mills and factories and also of the peasantry toiling on the land. These workers went by the name of Kirti (Workers) -Kisan (Peasants) party.

It was primarily with the help of his followers in Bengal, the All-India Kisan Sabha of Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, and the splinter groups who rallied under Sardar Sardul Singh Caveesher and other north-Indian leaders that Subhaschandra organized an Anti-Compromise rally at Ramgarh in March 1940, and there he made the heartening discovery that thousands of people who had come for the Congress session participated more enthusiastically in his rally than in the Congress meeting, which many of them did not attend at all. This claim is indirectly supported by Maulana Azad, then Congress President, and Jawaharlal Nehru, who in their accounts of this year pass over the Anti-Compromise rally which threw the Congress session into the shade.

The 'Rebel President' who had to resign his office in April 1939 proceeded to form the Forward Bloc in May, which he at first designed as a party within the Congress of which he thought he was still a member. His whirlwind campaign as a Forward Bloc leader to consolidate anti-imperialist forces proved too embarrassing for the Congress authorities who deprived him for three years of his office as President of the Bengal Provincial Committee in August 1939. In September 1939, in the course of his propaganda tour as leader of the Forward Bloc, he was addressing a mammoth meeting of two hundred thousand people—the largest audience he ever had—at Madras when he heard that the Second World War had begun, and he now felt that he must not be overtaken by events. In the course of a week or so he attended a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (from 8–15 September 1939) as a special invitee along with two other dissidents—Aney and Jaya Prakash Narayan. He also had long discussions with Mahatmaji, but he felt that they must part now, and the two never met again. The rivalry at Ramgarh in March 1940 was the external symbol of the gulf that thenceforth divided Subhas, the leader of the Indian National Army yet to be formed, and the Indian National Congress of Nehru, Patel and Azad.

#### IV

At about this time Subhas must have been casting his eyes beyond the boundaries of India for effective assistance, political

and military, that would enable him to wrest freedom. As he himself put it later on, 'In the course of this struggle', meaning the Freedom Struggle since 1857, 'tremendous sacrifices have been made and many have given their lives. There was, however, one method that still remained for us to take up and that was the organization of a real modern national army.' And that, history will say, was his greatest gift to the nation. In the world outside India there were three important power groups: (i) the democratic—the Imperialist alliance of Britain, France and America, (ii) Bolshevik Russia and its Communist organization, for brevity called the Comintern, and (iii) the anti-Comintern countries—Germany, Japan and Italy. Subhas could have no truck with the first group which included Britain, and as he had also no use for 'any sentimentalism like Nehru's anti-Axis foreign policy', he would be equally receptive to advances from Germany, Italy, Japan and also from Russia provided they treated him as an ally rather than as a protégé. His argument was that independence would be meaningful only if it was accompanied by a better life for the masses, that is to say, by socialism. But socialistic reforms do not come of themselves, they have to be imposed by a strong central government whose power did not depend on canvassing or manipulation of votes. That is why Stalin's government had to be as authoritarian as Hitler's or Mussolini's. Neither was he democratic in the sense in which Jawaharlal, with his liberal British background, understood democracy. Writing about post-War Britain, Peter Calvocoressi comments, 'The democratic socialist belief in parliamentary debate and legislation as the road to socialism seemed to be belied and the New Left came into existence as a reaction against a parliamentary charade in which parties put sterile consensus before social action . . .'<sup>99</sup>

No useful purpose will be served by discussing how far Subhaschandra was right in equating Comintern Russia with anti-Comintern Germany, neither is it profitable to speculate whether he would have, had he returned to India and assumed power, been able to combine a strong central government with a people's democracy that was not screened off by an Iron Curtain. But there can be no doubt about the courage and independence of his decision to leave India, keeping his options open between Comintern and anti-Comintern. I am reliably

informed that early in 1940, he secretly met a Japanese emissary in a suburban villa of his brother Saratchandra Bose, but who this emissary was it is no longer possible to ascertain. Although endowed with a remarkable capacity for inspiring confidence in others, he kept his own counsel and would tell each 'volunteer' or follower only what that particular person should know or do. It must have been soon after this that his nephew Dwijendranath Bose, who obviously had no idea about the earlier meeting, made arrangements for more intimate and more detailed discussions between Subhaschandra and Ohasi, Deputy Foreign Minister of Japan, in the chamber of a rising young barrister in south Calcutta. This interview was so secret that Subhaschandra not only received the visitor away from their own houses at Elgin Road and Woodburn Park but also asked the barrister to leave his chamber after making arrangements for tea and refreshments for two persons. The young barrister readily agreed, but although nobody knows what talks Subhaschandra had with the Japanese politician, there was no doubt that some definite proposals were mooted. Soon after, Lala Sankarlal came to meet Subhaschandra who directed him to go to Japan and provided him with a partly faked passport. Returning from Japan, Lalaji reported that his mission had succeeded, that is to say, Japan had promised the support asked for. It might be mentioned here that Japan was at this time trying to establish a 'Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere', though the Pearl Harbor venture was yet far off.

Subhaschandra looked towards the Far East to Japan, a signatory to the Anti-Comintern Pact, but he had his eyes also on the Comintern itself, especially because Germany and Russia were then bound together by a Non-aggression Pact. It was when this pact was being signed in Moscow (23 August 1939) that Subhaschandra went to Peshawar in the course of a long tour he had undertaken to explain the objectives of the Forward Bloc. In N.W.F.P., in spite of the hold of the Gandhian leader Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Subhaschandra had a strong group of devoted and daring followers who organized a mammoth meeting at Peshawar to honour him and receive his message. One of the organizers of this meeting was a young man named Bhagatram Talwar,<sup>100</sup> a Pakhtoon from the district of Mardan, who had been connected with various political bodies

—the Congress, the newly formed Forward Bloc and also the Kirti (Workers) Party which was inclined to communism.

Who was this Bhagatram and how did Subhaschandra Bose come to pick him up? In a word he was a man of Pakhtoonland, and he claims that the entire region from Amudariya or the river Oxus in the north and the Indus in the south is the land of Pakhtoons. For the present narrative it is what was at one time called the N.W. Frontier Province of India, consisting of six districts—Hazara, Mardan, Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and D. I. Khan—with a total area of fourteen thousand square miles and a population of about thirty lakhs of whom more than 91 per cent were Muslims. To the east lay Punjab separated by the Attock Bridge on the Indus, and strategically the most important spot on the west was the Khyber Pass through which the majority of invaders from Alexander to Ahmad Shah Abdali had penetrated into India. No other piece of Indian territory had so often been overrun by foreign conquerors as Pakhtoonland and yet nobody had been able to subdue these people. Hardy as the rocks amidst which they were bred, they held life cheap and freedom as the dearest possession. Guns, whether country-made or smuggled, were freely used, and every Pakhtoon regarded his hut as his castle. It was by a miracle that Mahatmaji and Abdul Gaffar Khan, popularly known as the Frontier Gandhi, converted them to the creed of non-violence, but the inner fierceness of spirit in these men remained intact. When Harikishan's and Bhagatram's father, Lala Gurudasmal, heard that Harikishan had been chosen for an attempt on the life of the Punjab Governor, he coached his son in the use of firearms and then himself sent Harikishan on what both father and son knew would be the latter's last journey.

As one reads accounts of these people, gentle yet ferocious, one is struck by more than one peculiarity. They were so different from other races that the entire population could not be made amenable to the civilian rule of the Provincial Governor. 'Between the NWFP and the frontier of Afghanistan', says Michael Edwardes, 'there were tribal areas, not administered directly by the NWFP government, whose tribes were also Pathan by race, and semi-independent of government interference. Relations between the tribes and the British were handled by officers of the central department of external af-

fairs.<sup>101</sup> The peculiar topography of the region, the inaccessibility of the hide-outs and the duality of control made this tribal belt an attractive haunt for political absconders who would be tempted to use the Khyber track for egress and ingress. The risks inherent in such arduous ventures in an unfamiliar region were largely reduced by the intrepid nationalism of these Pathans. Indeed I have felt that these people were the best answer to the two-nation theory propagated by Jinnah under the inspiration of his British mentors. Subhaschandra Bose was a Bengali Hindu with whom, in 1939, Jinnah was willing to negotiate only as the President of the Hindu Congress. Yet the sponsors of Subhas's escape two years later were ninety per cent Muslims and only ten per cent Hindus and Sikhs, one of the most enthusiastic and trusted of these link-men being Abdul Majid Khan, brother of Abdul Qayum Khan, leader of the Muslim League in N.W.F.P.

Another significant feature of the political and social life of the people of this sparsely populated region is a curious mixture of camaraderie and suspiciousness. An interesting example is supplied by Santimoy Ganguly who was selected for follow-up action after Subhaschandra's escape out of India and Afghanistan. His first important contact in Punjab was Mian Akbar Shah, a Frontier man, then living at Nowshera where he was popularly known as 'Vakeel Saheb'. They had come out together from Vakeel Saheb's house, purchased tickets for Peshawar at Nowshera station but were, as a precautionary measure, to travel in different compartments. Peeping out of the window of his own compartment, Ganguly noticed with consternation that 'Vakeel Saheb' was talking agitatedly to a group of policemen who had encircled him. What would he do, Ganguly asked himself with trepidation, if, as seemed certain, 'Vakeel Saheb', on whom he depended for everything in that unknown region, was arrested and taken into custody? But a few minutes after, as soon as the guard blew his whistle and the train was on the move, the police people dispersed and 'Vakeel Saheb' hurried into a rear compartment. The journey across that rugged, snow-clad mountainous tribal area in the piercingly cold winter of N.W.F.P. and Afghanistan was full of physical hazards, and outsiders also ran the risk of attracting attention in a region where, though the average distance be-



tween one village and another was six to eight miles, villagers generally know all local people by sight and could easily spot a stranger. But a neutralizing factor was that most people in this region were either engaged in dubious occupations or were absconders who had taken refuge there after committing some crime in their own land. No wonder people were not inclined to disturb strangers with questions so that they themselves might not be in trouble. As for the guardians of law, they were lackadaisical and venal. Probably they thought that if the law was to be strictly enforced, the area would be half depopulated. Once when in a tight corner in Afghanistan, Bhagatram alias Rehmat Khan huddled Subhaschandra alias Ziauddin into a group of camel drivers who were not subjected to any checking, and when he himself went to the office to register his name, he found the official fast asleep! In the inn in Afghanistan, in which they found what they considered a safe lodging, they were pestered by an Afghan spy who possibly mistook them for smugglers and had to be daily fended off with small tips. The spy's demands began to grow larger and larger until Ziauddin made him a present of his wrist watch and the spy at once became their friend. Rehmat Khan, although quite alive to the dangers of their perilous adventure, thought that a much smaller gift would have sufficed.

## V

It is time to go back to the point where we left off at the Ramgarh rally of Subhaschandra's followers and Subhaschandra's first moves to take full advantage of Britain's involvement in the Second World War. Although he had his eyes on Japan which was a signatory to the anti-Comintern pact, it was Russia, the home of the Communist International, to which he looked first, and his latest wish was to seek refuge in Russia. He never explained the reasons behind this decision, though some people have suggested that Russia promised him all kinds of assistance, but had scruples about sending an army inside the territory of a power with which it was not in a state of belligerency. It seems to me that he might have had a favourable response to his overtures from Russia—how and where he made these overtures we do not know—but he must certainly have been encouraged by

the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact of August 1939 and hoped that he would be able to profit by his contacts with both Germany and Russia, and Japan might wait for the time being. There could also be difficulties in escaping through Burma and the Pacific islands, which might not be as hospitable to Ziauddin as they were to Girish Mahapatra in Sarat Chatterji's novel.

Subhaschandra's principal reason for the choice of the N.W.F.P. route seems to be the support he had among the Frontier people and the deep-seated antipathy of the inhabitants of this area—the Governor's Province and the tribal belt—to the British. One of his closest followers in Calcutta was the editor of *Deshdarpan*, S. Niranjana Singh Talib, who introduced him to a prominent industrialist, Sardar Baldev Singh, under whose protection Achhar Singh Chhena, an intrepid worker of the Kirti-Kisan (or Kirti) Party of Punjab, was then absconding in Calcutta. He discussed with them his plan of escape to Russia through Afghanistan, and they promised to make foolproof arrangements for smuggling him out under the nose of the British and Afghan authorities.

This daring worker of the Kirti Party, Achhar Singh, rushed to Punjab, met Mian Akbar Shah, our 'Vakeel Saheb' of Nowshera, and then proceeded to N.W.F.P. where he held consultations with Ramkishan and other close comrades. It was decided that Ramkishan would first, on his own, cross over to the tribal area, then to Afghanistan on a kind of reconnaissance tour, and then only would they embark on the great adventure of sending Subhaschandra out to Moscow. It was also decided that Bhagatram Talwar, Ramkishan's trusted disciple and an inhabitant of Ghalla Dher in the district of Mardan in N.W.F.P., who was well acquainted with the tribal area and who could easily pass himself off as an Afghan, would accompany Subhaschandra to Afghanistan. He was at first told that he would have to chaperon a V.I.P., whose name they did not yet disclose, to Afghanistan and thence to Russia. Bhagatram, later on an active member of the C.P.I., heard about his charge in May-June 1940, and started renewing his contacts in the tribal area and beyond. But he received a message from Ramkishan that the Soviet Embassy was very unresponsive and Ramkishan was waiting for further instructions. Then Achhar Singh himself,

with the help of Abad Khan, a lorry driver who made frequent trips to Kabul, managed to cross the border and joined Ramkishan, who told him that as it would be useless contacting the Soviet Embassy, they should undertake a perilous journey to Russia on their own. Without any passport or visa they had to cross the river Oxus, swollen in autumn, at a point away from the vigilance of security officials. Ramkishan was washed away by the onrushing waves and nobody could say where his body was carried away. Like Habu Mitra of the Rodda operation, this patriot too died in an unknown land so that his own people might be free. No memorial has so far been raised to these martyrs and few people have even heard of them.

Achhar Singh safely crossed over into the Russian frontier but was immediately arrested. He was, however, known to some important leaders and could get a hearing, and the response was not unhelpful. Though the outside world did not know much of it then, the relations between Russia and Germany were at this time under strain, and not willing to annoy Great Britain, all that Moscow did was to issue instructions to check points at the Afghan border that Subhaschandra Bose might be given safe passage, adding a rider that it was expected that he would not stay in the Soviet Union. For the time being this was enough for Achhar Singh who returned to India and met Bhagatram and other associates.

In the meantime Bhagatram was getting somewhat restive. He had by now sensed who the V.I.P. was and had started renewing old tribal friendships and making preparations. Couriers were also shuttling between Satyaranjan Bakshi, who was conducting the arrangements in Calcutta through his trusted agents, chiefly Binoy Sengupta, and the leaders at the opposite end—Mian Akbar Shah, Achhar Singh and others in Punjab and N.W.F.P. Binoy told me that he used to meet the emissaries of the Kirti-Kisan party in a mess in Mott Lane and the password was 'Bloc Forward'. But for some reason the great bid for Indian emancipation was postponed, and Subhaschandra somehow or other got entangled in a local agitation—the removal from the Secretariat area of the Holwell monument which commemorated the Black Hole, where Siraj-ud-daulah was alleged to have caused the death by suffocation of more than a hundred English prisoners by confining them in a room too narrow and

stuff for so many persons to breathe in. Many Indian historians rejected the allegation as a myth and Subhaschandra, like other patriots, considered it a slur on the last ruler of independent Bengal.

It would not be worth while raking up the controversy about the truth of the Black Hole story or answering the allegation then made by Subhaschandra's detractors that it was a ploy to canvass Muslim support. What, however, should have struck political watchers was the total irrelevance of the movement to Subhaschandra's plans which he had been loudly proclaiming from different platforms—Tripuri Congress (1939), Ramgarh rally (March 1940) and Nagpur Conference (June 1940). His leadership of this local agitation was in fact a ruse to divert official attention from what he was actually planning to undertake. On account of a slight indiscretion on the part of either Niranjana Singh Talib or Baldev Singh, the news of the Russian programme had leaked out so widely that one fine morning a high official of the Corporation of Calcutta came to Subhaschandra and requested him to finalize before his departure from India the promotion he himself had been seeking. Subhaschandra suppressed his consternation at the leakage which he felt the Intelligence agencies could not have missed. So he wanted to show that he was now too deeply involved in a local agitation to think of moving out of India, and the ruse succeeded. Subhaschandra was arrested on the eve of the proposed Satyagraha in July 1940 and sent to Presidency Jail where he met two important prisoners—his own comrades Hemchandra Ghose and Satyaranjana Bakshi—with whom he could, in the privacy of the jail, discuss his plans of escaping out of India.

As the Bengal Premier A. K. Fazlul Haq made an announcement that Government would dismantle the Holwell monument, the organizers called off the agitation, thus demolishing the ostensible grounds for detaining Subhas any longer. But Government had arrested him under Regulation III of 1818 which provided for arrest and detention of seditious persons without mentioning any specific charge. However, by doing so Government only walked into the trap Subhas had laid for them. He went on a hunger-strike, resisted forced feeding and his condition deteriorated so much that his doctors felt alarmed. The Government, already involved in a global war, would not

take the risk of allowing such a famous revolutionary to die in prison. So there was some sort of a compromise in terms of which Subhaschandra would be home-interned in his ancestral residence at Elgin Road, now appropriately renamed after Lala Lajpat Rai. He would be under round-the-clock police surveillance and plain clothes Intelligence men were posted to check the ingress and egress of all visitors, except his nephews and nieces, children of Saratchandra Bose, who lived a few yards away, or other very close relations. This fell 'pat', as the asinine Bottom might say, for Subhaschandra Bose refused to receive any visitors at all, including the members of his family, as he was absorbed in deep religious meditation in a solitary room. There was indeed a mystical side to Subhaschandra's character to which many of his erstwhile friends have borne testimony, and there was a widely accepted legend that once upon a time, while yet in his teens, he had wandered away from home possibly to become a *sannyasin*. Half believing this, the police did not disturb their troublesome charge who was backed by an influential brother, a leading lawyer of Calcutta. They did not, however, altogether relax their grip, for they now brought two specific cases against him, one of which was due to be heard on 26 January 1941. And they also managed to win over a near relation who was at that time living in the house, but he was lured into leaving Calcutta for a job supposed to be awaiting him elsewhere.

Subhaschandra spent about forty days as a recluse in his Elgin Road house, entrusting his 'external affairs' to Satyaranjan Bakshi who, luckily, had been released almost simultaneously with him, also on grounds of ill health. While Subhaschandra grew a beard and a moustache large enough to make him unrecognizable, Bakshi renewed his contacts with the Frontier people, Mian Akbar Shah and others, and also began collecting funds for the hazardous journey ahead. I know of only one of the sources tapped by him, but that itself is revealing. He told Binoy Sengupta and two others—as far as I remember, Jyotish Guha and Kamakhya Roy—that they must each give him Rs. 500 (Rs. 5000 in current value) every other day for two weeks and that he would not take a 'No' from any of them. I do not know how the other 'volunteers' managed, but Binoy's experience bears ample testimony to the patriotic fervour of those

days. Finding himself in a quandary, Binoy rushed to Jamshedpur where two of his uncles were comfortably placed. Through them Binoy had acquired friends and sympathizers among Tisco officials and their wives. When Binoy, who even then did not know the whole story, whispered to a few of these men and women that the money was needed by Subhaschandra, incredible though it might have sounded, some of these women at once parted with their ornaments and the men assured him that he need not come again; they would arrange to send him the money according to arrangement. Binoy is dead but his story still rings in my ears. I must also add that in my view, although Subhas was now finally separating himself from what he called the 'Gandhian Wing', this widespread patriotic fervour, both overt and covert, was largely due to the national awakening brought about by Mahatma Gandhi. The savant as well as the industrialist, the film-actress as well as the housewife, the saint as well as the reprobate—all cheerfully contributed their share when the cause was the country's freedom. I know that some revolutionaries were occasionally given shelter by public women who thought they were expiating their sins by this national service.

To return to Subhaschandra. For some days, say, from 10 January 1941, Sisir Bose, the youngest son of Sarat Bose, used to visit the Elgin Road house at night in one of his father's cars and would go back to their Woodburn Park residence after some time. There was nothing in it to arouse the suspicion of the police picket, for Sisir belonged to this house as much as any permanent resident, and it was precisely to hoodwink the police that he continued visiting the Elgin Road house at that hour. On 16/17 January at about 12.30 at night Sisir drove his car out of the house with Subhaschandra dressed as a Pathan, but wrapped up in a shawl like any other man in winter. He had come downstairs by the flight of steps from the upper storey of the kitchen at the back of the building. Inside the house, excepting the chosen few, no one who saw him could scan his face when he was sitting inside the car. Nephew Aurobindo had already put his light luggage—a small suitcase and his bedding—in the car. As Sisir started the engine, Aurobindo gently pushed the main gate open. At six next morning, they entered the house of Sisir's eldest brother Asokenath Bose at Bararee

near Dhanbad where the (supposed) Pathan companion was accommodated in a room of the outhouse. No servant or visitor took any notice of the stranger, who at nightfall walked out by himself and went towards the bus-stand—quite a normal thing. A few minutes later he was picked up by Asoke, his wife, and, of course, Sisir, who now drove to Gomoh station. The car halted a few yards away from the station and from inside it the nephews saw their uncle enter the platform, but they did not drive back home until the Peshawar Mail had steamed off from Gomoh.

## VI

In the meantime Bhagatram, whom we now may take up as the key figure although he was not the leader, had with the help of his comrades made all the necessary preparations for receiving Subhaschandra, for housing him at Peshawar and then escorting him across the tribal area and the international border to Afghanistan. He consulted an old revolutionary, Sanwar Hossein, who was then living amongst the Bajaur tribe and who, after giving his own instructions, sent Bhagat southwards to the Mohmand area where Haji Amin Shinwari, an Indian emigrant in Afghanistan, was visiting at that time. Haji Amin, a revolutionary and also a learned Muslim theologian, had settled at the renowned mosque of Adda Sharif, spending his days in religious study and instruction, but the old revolutionary fire was still unextinguished in him. Bhagatram, however, could not meet Haji Saheb who had already gone back to Adda Sharif, but here was an important clue which the fugitives would utilize at the right moment.

After arranging a house for the temporary accommodation of Subhaschandra at Peshawar, Bhagatram discussed with his friends the strategy of escape. Although he might look like a Pathan with his beard, hefty build and Pathan attire, Subhaschandra alias Ziauddin was ignorant of Pushtu and Persian, and so must be passed off as a deaf-mute whom his nephew Rehmat Khan alias Bhagatram would be escorting to the holy mosque of Adda Sharif in the hope that by an act of piety he might be miraculously cured. Such a story would easily deceive ignorant, superstitious and simple-minded Pathans who were

not unduly curious. But there were other difficulties. British authority in the tribal area, which was carefully demarcated from the directly administered N.W.F.P., depended, in a word, on 'blackmail', which I. G. Elliott, following the Oxford Dictionary, defines as a tribute exacted by freebooters for protection and immunity.<sup>102</sup> In other words, the unattached Frontier man whose principal implement was his gun thought that it was his inalienable right to earn his living by means of plunder and other atrocities in the settled territories nearby, and the British Indian Government which maintained a considerable force there paid these people handsome subsidies on condition that they would refrain from unrestricted pillage and allow safe passage, for the railway traffic through the Khyber Pass from Landi Kotal to Landi Khana, and also along the other routes from Peshawar to Kabul. No wonder that with such a background, the tribal Pathan, by nature independent and hospitable, was also apt to be treacherous, because his subsistence depended on subsidies for abstaining from crime. That is why many of them, although otherwise freedom-loving, acted as spies for the Frontier Army whose duty it was to keep the peace in that sensitive area. The ostensible occupation of the Pathans was ploughing their stony fields or grazing cattle in pastures where such pastures were available. They had a distaste for crafts and trades; artisans such as potters, weavers, masons and carpenters were recruited from the plains, and some of them were Hindus and Sikhs, living as permanent tenants of the local landlord. There were feuds and raids but communal disturbances were rare.

It is against this background that one has to consider Subhaschandra's daring escape from India, organized by Bhagatram and his advisers, amongst whom Abad Khan, who was an ex-employee of the transport department, was very knowledgeable about the tract and its various routes. Subhas and his guides could not take the Khyber rail train, because in front of it stood the Jamrud Fort, the headquarters of the British Army detachment stationed in the area. But the road to the south of Jamrud was short and in that rugged country relatively easy to negotiate in spite of the nearness of the Fort manned by a contingent of British soldiers. So it was decided that the party, consisting of Ziauddin, Rehmat Khan, Abad Khan and a



trained guide selected by Abad Khan, would begin their journey a few miles south of Jamrud and proceed across the Afridi-Shinwari tribal area and cross over to Afghanistan. Except for the Army camp at the Kajuri Plain it might be called a safe area, and as there was a Muslim shrine on this route, they might pass themselves off as pilgrims.

Subhaschandra arrived at Peshawar Cantonment station punctually on 19 January 1941, where at the platform Bhagatram watched him from a distance taking a tonga and going to Tajmahal Hotel where he himself had booked his accommodation. Another watcher was Mian Akbar Shah who had boarded the train at the city station and got down from a different compartment just to check if the distinguished fugitive could get out of the station without any hitch. Later on, instead of going there himself, Akbar Shah sent Abdul Majid Khan, younger brother of Abdul Qayum Khan, to Tajmahal hotel to tell Subhas that all arrangements were ready and that he would be shifted to a safe retreat the next day. From the new house, on the morning of 22 January, Subhaschandra accompanied by Bhagatram (Rchmat Khan) and the guide especially selected by Abad Khan were driven in a car by Abad Khan himself, with no luggage except some garments and blankets. When the car reached the barrier near Jamrud, Abad Khan, well known at the checkpoint as a transport service man, signed the register and there was no hitch. About a furlong from the Shinwari border the three passengers came out of the car and trekked on without any objection from the border sentry who took them as pilgrims to the nearby Muslim shrine. When Abad Khan saw from a distance that they were well inside Shinwari territory, he returned to Peshawar in his car. Here was a sturdy patriot who like Hira Singh in Saratchandra's *Pather Dabi* thought that the leader's word was law and carrying out his wishes his best reward. When later on he escorted Santimoy Ganguly, he pointed with pride to the Attock bridge and claimed that 'Babuji' (whom others would call Netaji) had entrusted him with the task of blowing it up when the work of sabotage would begin!

Now Subhas and Bhagatram were outside the jurisdiction of British India, for except that the tribals nominally accepted British Indian suzerainty and agreed to keep the peace, they

were autonomous in their territories. It was to some extent a relief, but there was still cause for anxiety; for the tribal area was infested with India Government spies and Afghanistan might not have the courage to give political asylum to Subhaschandra Bose. In the deep winter of January, the long journey, some of it made by night, was strenuous and full of hazards, especially for a man who was unaccustomed to the stony, hilly roads and the freezing cold. Inside the windowless, stone-built huts, the fugitive felt like being suffocated for lack of fresh air. Occasionally he would be so exhausted that he needed to be provided with a mule. Mules were not difficult to procure, but they were also a hazardous means of transport for one unused to them. The mules could manage a steep ascent, but when descending on the other side they might lose their foothold and slip down, as Subhaschandra's mule once did, when he was saved only by the dexterity of the guide and the muleman. In a sparsely populated area, the Pathans, not very inquisitive people generally, easily detect unknown faces and outsiders have sometimes to face simple but inconvenient questions. But once these people got plausible answers, they would not press their enquiry further, for, as I have already said, many people in the area had themselves dubious antecedents or were engaged in shady occupations. When Subhas and his companions had passed the holy shrine, and could no longer pose as pilgrims, somebody asked them who they were, and the questioner was satisfied by Rehmat Khan's ready reply that they were masons from Peshawar going to help build Malik Abdul Latif's house.

Trekking in this way, Subhaschandra, Bhagatram and the guide crossed the tribal border and reached the first Afghan village on 24 January 1941 at 1 a.m. They sent the guide back at dawn. Once inside Afghanistan, both of them—particularly Subhaschandra—felt much relieved, but they were not yet out of the wood. I have already referred to an Afghan spy who would pester them later on and whom Subhaschandra bought off with his own wrist watch. While, earlier, on their way to Jalalabad they were resting on a village road, a hefty Pathan emerged unnoticed from the other side and asked them where they hailed from. Bhagatram replied that they were from Lal-pura, an Afghan village some miles away. The newcomer

frowned and said that that could not be possible, for he himself was a man of that village. Bhagatram collected his wits and answered that although he had connections with Lalpura, they were actually Peshawaris and were going to Adda Sharif in the hope that his deaf-mute uncle standing by him might be cured. This partly disarmed the man's suspicions, and the trick was completed by Subhaschandra's histrionic ability. The intruder claimed that he was himself something of a medicine-man and might make an attempt to heal the patient. At a sign from Bhagatram, Subhaschandra, who as a deaf man was supposed not to have followed the conversation, now opened his mouth, and the healer found the tongue so stiff that there could be no doubt in his mind about the patient being deaf and dumb. He just suggested a cure and went his way.

A pleasant side to this arduous and risky journey was the ready and warm hospitality offered by Pathans and Afghans to strangers. One instance, to which probably there is no parallel in life or literature, was the reception given to the party of three—the two fugitives and the guide—when they knocked at their first resting place in a village in Afghanistan on 24 January 1941. It was a one-room hut occupied by a young man and his wife who had been married that day, and it was their first night together. Not at all ruffled by the disturbance on their bridal night, the couple extended a hearty welcome to the three strangers and the young wife even cooked a hasty meal for them. When the day broke, the guide had to go back and Bhagatram wanted to send a one-word code message to Abad Khan; but they had no paper or pen, neither had their hosts who were illiterate. Understanding their difficulty, the young wife pulled out the paper wrapping of a ball of thread, put a few drops of water on her palm, adding some indigo dust, and then fished out something like a matchstick which served for a pen. And Bhagatram could scribble his code message, informing Abad Khan that they were safe well within Afghanistan.

## VII

When the Netaji story was first published, most of us thought that he had just slipped into Afghanistan where he had Uttamchand waiting to send him to Berlin as if it was a fairly simple

and smooth affair. But it was not really so, and although Uttamchand did his job with remarkable courage and efficiency, he came somewhat late on the scene.

Afghanistan is a small country and, with the best of intentions, the Afghan Government of those days might not be able to resist pressure from the British; and Subhaschandra was not even sure about Afghan intentions. So on 25 January 1941 Bhagatram took him to Jalalabad and from there to Adda Sharif, where Haji Amin Shinwari had settled, four and a half miles away from Jalalabad. Bhagatram introduced him to Haji Saheb as an Indian revolutionary who wanted to go to the Soviet Union, but did not disclose who he was. An old patriot, Haji Saheb enthusiastically supported the idea and not only gave them directions about the journey to Kabul via Jalalabad but also a useful tip that if they were really in difficulty, they should pose as Naqeeb Saheb's men. As Naqeeb Saheb was known to be pronouncedly pro-British, British spies and agents of whom they were afraid would leave them alone.

The journey from Jalalabad over a mountainous region was a tiring exercise but a greater hurdle was the checkpoint at Budhkhak where, as I have already said, the wily Bhagatram placed Subhaschandra amongst a motley crowd of camel drivers and was spared the trouble of inventing an account of himself because the checking official was fast asleep. On 27 January they reached Kabul, and after booking accommodation in a *serai* (inn), set about making contact with the Soviet Embassy, but did not meet with any success. By that time the news of Subhaschandra's escape from his house had been published in India and flashed all over the world. So Ziauddin and Rehmat Khan did not dare to enter the Soviet Embassy openly for fear of being arrested by the security men at the gate. They roamed about the place in the hope of attracting the attention of Soviet officials when they would come out. The least they hoped for was to get a good view of these Russians so that they might make an attempt to approach these officials when they would be out in the city. One day Bhagatram tried to speak to two Russian ladies in Persian, seeking to pass a message to the Russian Ambassador, but the ladies took no notice of him. Not meeting with any success here, the fugitives now shifted their

attention to the Soviet Trade Agency Office, located at some distance from the Embassy. Though this Agency in the course of its official business dealt with ordinary Afghan citizens like Ziauddin and Rehmat Khan, they met with a rebuff here also. In the course of their fruitless saunterings, they came across, somewhat by accident, the Soviet Ambassador seated in his car stuck up in the snow, and Rehmat Khan, who thought that he had got his life's chance, lost no time in telling this dignitary who his companion was—a secret he had kept even from Haji Amin—and also what his mission was. The Ambassador asked a few searching questions and then passed on without a word of encouragement.

All their hopes from the Russians having thus been dashed to the ground, Subhaschandra and Bhagatram now thought of trying their luck with the German Legation, for the Germans, being then at war with Great Britain, might welcome Britain's bitterest enemy in India. So one day Rehmat Khan managed to dodge the Afghan guard at the gate of the German Legation and succeeded in pushing Ziauddin inside on the plea that he wanted to make enquiries about a relation supposedly ill at Teheran. Here was the first glimpse of success, for Subhaschandra met an official who said that he had seen Subhas in Germany at the time when Subhas had met the German Foreign Secretary Ribbentrop. The official promised to contact his principals, and whatever message he received would be communicated to Subhaschandra through Herr Thomas of Siemens Company at Thomas's Kabul office about three days after. Returning to the *serai* by different routes, both Bhagatram and Subhaschandra felt depressed, because Bhagatram seemed to have been shadowed by a watcher whom he dodged temporarily by mixing in a crowd and making slight changes in his dress. Subhaschandra too had a suspicion that his entry into and exit from the German Legation had not gone unnoticed. And at about this time they were pestered by repeated visits from the Afghan spy who has been mentioned more than once in this narrative. They felt they must leave their present residence, but they were perplexed, racking their brains about where they could find secure shelter in a small town like Kabul. The message that they received through Herr Thomas on 5 Feb-

ruary was tantalizing. Berlin authorities were glad to hear of Subhaschandra's presence in Afghanistan and would soon be sending instructions.

It was when the fugitives were in this quandary, unable to decide where to hide their heads, that Bhagatram thought of looking for one Uttamchand, an old colleague and co-worker of the Naw Jawan Bharat Sabha of Bhagat Singh and Rajguru, who had reportedly been living at Kabul and who might help them find a safer residence. The attempt succeeded, but there was a snag here too. Although Uttamchand's house now became a second home for Subhaschandra, yet soon after their arrival there Uttamchand's co-tenant Roshanlal left with his family and belongings. This was a disturbing development, for even Uttamchand had very little knowledge of Roshanlal's antecedents or contacts. It took him some time to rid himself and his guests of all fears on this score. He was, however, satisfied on enquiry that Roshanlal was too nervous and timid a person to have any political connexion; he had left Uttamchand's house out of sheer fright at the sight of strange-looking Pathans in a Hindu household, though he gave out a story of a haunted house. Yet Roshanlal's conduct appeared so queer that Uttamchand took the precaution of temporarily removing Subhaschandra to a different residence and did not bring him back to the comforts of his own house until 15 February when they were all agreed that there were no grounds for fear on Roshanlal's account.

In the meantime Bhagatram met some interesting personalities who might speed them on their mission which was yet in an embryonic stage. One was Haji Abdus Sobhan, an old Indian revolutionary, who after a chequered career abroad had settled down at Kabul as an Afghan national with a German wife and set up a woollen factory. The proposal of establishing contacts with the Russian Embassy was revived, and when two Russian ladies visited his factory, Haji Abdus Sobhan sent a message from Subhaschandra to the Russian Ambassador, but these ladies were not heard of again. On the German side also there was no positive response so far from Herr Thomas who only said that they were trying hard to elicit a reply from Berlin. So by 15 February Bhagatram, Uttamchand and Haji Abdus Sobhan were seriously considering the proposal of Subhas-

chandra crossing over to Russia on his own with one or two companions. It would be in the same manner in which they had crossed over to Afghanistan from India. The exhausting journey, the unfamiliar climate, and the uncongenial food had told on Subhaschandra's health, but after a few days of more comfortable life in Uttamchand's house and on account of the care and attention he received from Uttamchand and his wife, he was restored to normal health, and he too heartily endorsed the new proposal. Haji Abdus Sobhan introduced Bhagatram to a hardy adventurous man named Yakub who was thoroughly acquainted with the border area between Russia and Afghanistan and whose brother-in-law was a permanent resident there. Without disclosing who the third man would be and where he was, Bhagatram paid money to Yakub to buy three bus tickets from Kabul to Khanabad on the near side of the Oxus—for himself and the two passengers he would be escorting. Yakub readily agreed and 23 February was fixed as the day of departure.

All this time the unpromising contact with the German Legation continued and suddenly there was a glimmer of hope. On 22 February Herr Thomas asked Bhagatram to visit the Italian Legation, assuring him of a ready welcome from the Italian Minister. After so many rebuffs Bhagatram not very hopefully entered the Italian Legation by the back door, and on being challenged by the Afghan guards, said that he was a cook sent by Herr Thomas to the Italian Minister. He was at first received somewhat rudely, but after a telephonic conversation with Herr Thomas, the Minister changed his demeanour and spoke out frankly and unreservedly. In their view the journey proposed by Subhaschandra was both arduous and risky, but the Axis Powers, he said, had not been sitting idle. They had decided to give him an Italian visa and hoped that as Russia was on friendly terms with them, she would not object to Subhaschandra's journey through Russian territory. But the arrangements were not finalized yet, though he expected that there would not be any further delay. He also confided that in case Russia did not agree, they were thinking of an alternative route through Iran and Syria, from where Subhaschandra might easily cross over to Rome and Berlin. The Minister also desired a meeting with Subhaschandra, if possible the same evening, so

that they could discuss the political and military situation and fix their programmes. But next morning they were scheduled to leave with Yakub!

When Subhaschandra heard of the interview, he lost no time, and dressed in European clothes, walked to the Italian Legation accompanied by Bhagatram. They had no difficulty this time, for hearing the knock, Mr Anzilotti, the Minister's Secretary, came out to receive them at the gate and sent away his Afghan employees. As the discussion continued for some hours, it was felt that Subhaschandra should stay for the night at the Legation. So Bhagatram had to leave him with his new hosts, because he himself must return to Uttamchand and must also dispose of Yakub, asking him to cancel the proposed journey to Russia. It had been arranged that Bhagatram would meet Subhaschandra the next day at a magnificent house built by ex-King Amanullah. On 23 February Bhagatram went to Yakub earlier than the appointed hour and explained that the journey to Russia had to be cancelled because his friend, who had some difficulty at the other end, could not turn up in time. Subhaschandra came back in a car driven by Mr Chrishnini, the Second Secretary, who from now on became their contact man at the Italian Legation. If any message had to be given to Subhaschandra from the Italian side, it was to be carried by the Minister's wife Mrs Alberto Pietro Quaroni who would deliver it to Uttamchand at his shop.

There was no further snag and little to worry about, except waiting for the final signal. This came on 15 March when Uttamchand returned from his shop to say that Subhaschandra's luggage would be picked up on 16 March by the Legation people, and Subhas, who was to leave Kabul on the 18th morning, should be at Mr Chrishnini's residence the previous evening. As Subhaschandra was supposed to look like a Sicilian, his Italian passport had been issued in a Sicilian name—Orlando Mazotta. Starting from Kabul on 18 March, he left for Russia and travelling by train and aeroplane, reached Berlin on 28 March 1941. From then on, he would proceed from adventure to adventure, from one peril to another, and finally from defeat to victory and immortality.



## VIII

It would be interesting to have a look at what Indian politicians were doing during these crowded days in Subhaschandra's life—from July 1940 when he was arrested and sent to Presidency Jail to 28 March 1941 when he reached Berlin. From the narrative of Maulana Azad, who had become Congress President, it seems that there was a good deal of discussion amongst leading Congressmen which the Maulana himself considers 'theoretical'.<sup>103</sup> Most of the stalwarts wanted immediate installation of a National Government with some reservations; others like Rajagopalachari were ready to tone down the national demand further. It seemed to have been a barren exercise, because Great Britain was not willing to instal a National Government, clipping the powers of the Viceroy. Prominent Congressmen, long accustomed to accepting Mahatmaji's lead, had lost the power of thinking for themselves or initiating action on their own. Jawaharlal Nehru, the most vocal of these leaders, was undecided between Russian Communism and German Fascism because both were authoritarian, and was further embarrassed by the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact; neither could he support Great Britain which was democratic but imperialistic. Thus he was working towards his policy of 'non-alignment' which would later acquire a good deal of publicity; its great recommendation was and is its lack of positive content.

The entries for 1940-42 in the 'Gandhi Chronicle' compiled by E. G. Tendulkar for the Seventy-fifth Birthday Volume throw a flood of light on the 'homogeneous' Working Committee on which Mahatmaji insisted. On 3 July 1939 Vallabhbhai Patel had warned Jawaharlal against ruffling Bapuji's feelings. 'As it is, he is 71 and has lost much of his energy . . . Since that evening he has been thinking of retiring altogether . . .'<sup>104</sup> Yet a year later (8-13 August 1940) the Working Committee, of which Patel and Nehru were the most prominent members, pledged themselves to act under Gandhi's command and requested him to guide the Congress. Gandhiji accepted the leadership of the Congress Working Committee 'on its own terms' (January 1942).<sup>105</sup>

The old man of seventy-two, who had retained unimpaired his energy and his initiative, was entering upon the penultimate

stage of his unparalleled career. He was planning within himself the next move he would make but of which the Working Committee had no idea. Yet like many other prophets and leaders, he did not know that he would be unleashing forces that would outstrip him. It would be enough to say that he was the only man in the Congress who appreciated the heroic enterprise on which Subhaschandra Bose had embarked. '... I feel', says Maulana Azad, 'that he [Gandhiji] was becoming more and more doubtful about Allied victory. I also saw that Subhas Bose's escape to Germany had made a great impression on Gandhiji. He had not formerly approved many of Bose's actions but now I found a change in his outlook. Many of his remarks convinced me that he admired the courage and resourcefulness Subhas Bose had displayed in making his escape from India. His admiration for Subhas Bose unconsciously coloured his view about the whole war situation.'<sup>106</sup> It did more; it effected a radical change in Gandhiji's philosophy and programme of action. *Ramdhun* ('A Hymn to Ram') was replaced by the slogan *Karenge yeah Marenge* ('Do or Die').

## The Second Phase—Reconciliation of Opposites

Mahatmaji had told Lord Irwin that Subhas was his opponent who might denounce him, and Subhas did indeed denounce him, going so far as to dispute his all-India status. Somewhat scornfully he referred to Mahatmaji's large following in the Congress as the Gandhi Wing; but there was a sudden rapprochement, and Gandhi and Subhas began to tread the same path. In 1921, on his return from England, Subhas had gone straight to Mahatmaji for direction and felt somewhat disappointed. After twenty-one years it was Mahatmaji who took a leaf out of Subhaschandra's book, and in the process of the transformation which this signified he was even prepared to waive his moral scruples and adapt his policy to the realities of the War situation. He had initially a gentleman's reluctance to embarrass the British when they were fighting for survival, but now he threw such objections to the winds and served a quit notice on the Government when the enemy was actually knocking at the gates of India. In the past he had more than once called a halt to his campaigns, offering excuses which even Jawaharlal could not accept with good grace. A glaring instance of such abrupt withdrawal was his decision to suspend the Non-cooperation movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident, which the world would have forgotten but for his quixotic retreat. But in 1942 he clearly stated that there would be no going back, no halting halfway, no suspension. All these years he had shown an inexhaustible capacity for carrying on negotiations, but now he was in no mood for compromise, and the half-clad Fakir would not even look at a postdated cheque brought by an emissary from His Majesty's first servant—the Right Honourable Winston Spencer Churchill. Equally significant was his offer to

assume direct leadership of the movement that would follow the Quit India Resolution, and when Government held him responsible for the disturbances, he went on a fast in protest against the allegation rather than call off the movement.

Possibly no turning-point in Mahatmaji's career is so significant as his shift from individual Satyagraha to the mass struggle envisaged in the ultimatum of August 1942. And the change was due to the shock therapy administered by Subhaschandra's flight out of India and his amazing capacity for mobilizing resources in the cause of India's freedom. Cripps was taken aback to find Gandhiji, a believer in non-violence, speaking in glowing terms about Subhaschandra Bose who had been supporting the Axis powers in order to secure the defeat of the Allies. Even Maulana Azad who saw that Subhaschandra had 'coloured' Gandhiji's attitude to the War situation did not grasp the full significance of the change effected by Subhaschandra in Gandhiji's total outlook. In 1920 Mahatmaji changed the creed of the Home Rule League, then renamed Swaraj Sabha, omitting all reference to the British and asserting that he wanted self-government, with or without British connexion. Ten years later, even after the passing of the Independence Resolution and to Subhaschandra's consternation, Mahatmaji drew up a scheme for achieving what he called the 'substance of independence' in which there was no specific mention of India's demand for freedom from British control. But now, in 1942, after Subhaschandra's heroic dash to Berlin, Mahatmaji came to the conclusion that the essential precondition to India's independence was the withdrawal of the British from India. Thus the gulf that had separated the two leaders was now bridged—subject to the mild proviso that Mahatmaji wanted the withdrawal to be 'orderly'! Nobody took any notice of the proviso for which even Mahatmaji did not eventually seem to care, and the resolution about this orderly withdrawal has been universally interpreted as a peremptory notice to the British to quit India.

## II

In more ways than one, 1942 was an eventful year in the Indian struggle for freedom. It opened with Mahatmaji's an-

nouncement of his assumption of direct leadership coupled with the renomination of Jawaharlal Nehru as his successor. This was followed by Chiang Kai-shek's historic visit, partly sponsored by President Roosevelt but bitterly resented by Churchill. Then came the fall of Rangoon in March 1942, and Churchill condescended to send immediately one of his most important colleagues, Sir Stafford Cripps, to explore the Indian situation and offer tentative proposals for settlement of India's demands. More interestingly, almost simultaneously Col. Louis Johnson, a special representative of President Roosevelt, was in India on a mission the object of which could not be precisely known. Was he an observer ready to help Cripps, if any help was desired, or was he a watchdog sent by Roosevelt who knew Churchill too well to have complete faith in the latter's emissary in India? In fact Louis Johnson was both an observer and a watchdog and the relevant documents of the period, which have now seen the light of day, leave no doubt that his presence in India was tolerated but not welcomed by H.M.G. and their agents.

The country had been seething with so much discontent that at the slightest hint from the leadership—from Gandhi or Subhas—it would spill over and sweep the country in a blaze of outright rebellion. Such rebellion, even if it was suppressed for the moment, would break out again with renewed vigour and spread like wildfire. Government had only one remedy—repression, but a country cannot be governed if it has to be perpetually conquered. When Gandhiji launched his movement of individual Satyagraha in October 1940, it was like a token—some might call it 'phoney'—protest against an unresponsive Government, but when after a year Government decided to release these Satyagrahis, it was found that about 25,000 persons had been arrested and fines amounting to about Rs. 6 lakhs had been imposed—a consummation for which even the Congress was not prepared.

The 1942 movement, started on 8 August, was not intended to be a niggling affair. Gandhiji conceived it as a mass upsurge full of 'dangers and hardship', and the Viceroy and his Governors also were not going to take any risk. Most of the provinces had been brought under the Governors' direct control, and of those still administered by elected ministries, they were worried only about Bengal where the Governor Sir John

Herbert feared that Fazlul Haq, under Syamaprasad Mookerjee's influence, might be reluctant to take appropriate measures for dealing with the movement (II, no. 461).<sup>\*</sup> This lends credence to the report that when a few months later Fazlul Haq gave a public assurance about an enquiry into allegations of police excesses, Sir John Herbert bullied and hectoring him (consistently with British democratic, anti-fascist tradition?) into submitting his resignation, which also meant the exit of the inconvenient Syamaprasad Mookerjee. On 8 August 1942 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a distinguished educationist and a Fellow of the British Academy, wrote to the Viceroy warning him that if the movement was actually launched, it would spread like a conflagration in spite of the efforts of the Government (II, no. 473). The insensitive Viceroy appended a characteristically boorish comment—'outdated'—to this sensible letter by one who would one day occupy the Viceregal palace as India's second President. Linlithgow assured the Secretary of State that he would not 'delay arrest' so that the members of the Working Committee would not be able to disperse over India (II, no. 461), thinking in his own way that placing Gandhi and the Working Committee behind prison bars or inside the Aga Khan's palace would be enough to contain the movement.

The whole country, however, was at once in turmoil, caught in a hurricane as it were. In course of three days, that is to say, by 11 August, extensive sabotage on the railways began to be reported simultaneously from widely separated areas, and in less than a month, the Viceroy himself spoke of large-scale damages to railway stations, tracks and rolling stock. Apart from the loss of earnings which must have been very heavy, he wrote on 5 September, damage to property on a conservative estimate amounted to a crore of rupees. Several police stations, courts and treasuries were damaged, many of them totally destroyed (II, no. 698). Postal services in eastern Bengal, northern Assam, several districts in Central Provinces and the Madras Presidency and also in Bombay and Poona were dis-

<sup>\*</sup> In this and the following chapter the references within parentheses are to the documents collected in *The Transfer of Power* (1942-47), recently published by the British Government (Her Majesty's Stationery Office) in nine volumes. The number of the relevant volume (in roman numerals) is followed by that of the particular document cited.

rupted (II, no. 702). On 22 August, only a fortnight after the arrests, the Bihar Governor gave a lurid description of widespread disturbances, the thoroughness of which had to be seen to be believed (II, no. 612). In Satara in western India and in the Tamluk subdivision of Midnapore in Bengal, attempts were made to run a parallel government.

These disturbances were quelled with a heavy hand and the Government had often to resort to firing and had even to requisition airforce planes in places like Bihar where communications had been seriously dislocated. Lord Linlithgow was an English aristocrat with a narrow outlook, who had neither the philosophic vision nor the political insight which would have enabled him to save the situation he faced. Putting it more explicitly, one might say that if the 'liquidation of the British Empire' was round the corner, he was exactly the man to precipitate it. He noted with glee that in the disturbances in which the students played a significant part, Muslims had hardly any share, and from this he came to the utterly unjustifiable conclusion that 'the Congress was a Hindu organization and that Gandhi could not claim to represent the whole of India! The most interesting revelation in Linlithgow's correspondence during the Quit India agitation was a warning to the Secretary of State that H.M.G. must not toy with the movement for Sikhistan, because the Sikhs might be encouraged to defy the authority of Muslims. Incidentally His Excellency also made the startling admission that the whole concept of Pakistan was a fraud on the Hindus when he said, 'The Hindus have made the mistake of taking Jinnah seriously about Pakistan, and as a result they have given substance to a shadow.' (II, no. 701)

Macaulay's notorious characterization of the people of the lower Ganges seemed to have come home to roost. Chicanery, perjury, bluff and bluster became the principal weapons of the people who came to govern India from the banks of the Thames and the Clyde.

### III

Amery and Linlithgow were satisfied that the Quit India disturbances had been quelled and the Government's position satisfactorily consolidated. There seemed to be only two snags:

First, in spite of all the precautions taken, the chief of which was the incarceration of the members of the Congress Working Committee before they could disperse all over India, there was a spontaneous flare up throughout the country. Secondly, although the troops were faithful and hardworking, the authorities were not so sure of the loyalty of the police and the armed constabulary. As regards the first of these points, the arrest of the leaders at one fell swoop was a blessing in disguise, for the agitation gained momentum on account of the absence of these 'men of straw', who, after their long subservience to Gandhiji, had lost all initiative of thought and action, and could do little but carry on negotiations—and that, as far as possible, under Gandhiji's eyes. What these leaders could do on their own initiative had been demonstrated by Sardar Patel at Rajkot and would be demonstrated again, after independence, by Nehru in his maladroit handling of the Kashmir problem and, later, the Chinese War of 1962. The mishandling of the Cabinet Mission and the Congress thralldom to Mountbatten will be considered in greater detail later on.

How was it then that such a movement, so determined and so extensive, came into being? Before leaving India, Subhaschandra had made a political survey which, though largely belied by subsequent events, is not without significance for history. He thought that Gandhism which had lost dynamism and initiative should be discarded—an opinion which was refuted by Gandhiji's Quit India movement and the response it evoked. Looking for an alternative leadership, he mentioned, among others, Jawaharlal Nehru and M. N. Roy, but Nehru gave no proof of his capacity for independent thought and action in critical situations and did not deserve to be considered at all in this context. M. N. Roy who raised the slogan of a People's War on behalf of Britain as soon as Russia was involved in the war was soon forgotten by nationalist India though he might still be studied as a political thinker.

There remained Subhaschandra's Forward Bloc, its various allies, such as the Kirti-Kisan Party, and the Congress Socialist Party, which, although still somewhat amorphous, was full of vitality. When Subhaschandra escaped out of India, he left instructions with his followers headed by Satyaranjan Bakshi that they should continue the work of hampering the British war



effort in India and prepare the country for an internal uprising when he would, as he hoped, come back to support it with military assistance from Britain's enemies. It is with a view to promoting these two objectives that Satyaranjan Bakshi sent young Santimoy Ganguly to N.W.F.P. to meet 'Vakeel Saheb', and Bhagatram Talwar and renew contacts with the Italian Legation through whom messages and instructions from Subhaschandra were expected to be routed. Bhagatram and his friends of the Kirti Party decided to organize an All-India Revolutionary Council on which Santimoy Ganguly might serve as a nominee of Bakshi, and the Council was expected to carry on revolutionary activity in pursuance of Subhaschandra's wishes and instructions. Santimoy was deputed to N.W.F.P. a second time in 1942 in connexion with the new problems then facing the country and the party. But this second visit ended in disappointment. By this time Germany was engaged in a deadly struggle with Russia, and the Kirti Party, which was in fact an affiliate of the C.P.I., refused to have any truck with Subhaschandra's followers and did not even allow Santimoy to meet Bhagatram. Santimoy made a last request that although they were now parting company, there should be a gentleman's agreement that no secrets of the Forward Bloc would be passed on to Government agencies, and this the old comrades readily accepted. How far the agreement was honoured has never been ascertained. The fact remains, however, that soon after Santimoy's return from his second visit to N.W.F.P. most of the top men, especially those who were connected with Subhaschandra's flight—Satyaranjan Bakshi, Jyotish Guha and Binoy Sengupta—were arrested. It is also said that they were tortured, and Guha did not long survive his incarceration.

Nothing daunted, Santimoy and other young members carried on the work of sabotage and disruption to the best of their ability. As the ranks of leaders became depleted, the line of workers—both men and women—became longer and longer. Agents were planted in organizations connected with the war effort, especially in important establishments dealing with military supplies. By hampering communications, the saboteurs could impede the movement of goods, delay the transmission of messages, and what was more, they could resume contact with Netaji Subhaschandra Bose when he arrived near the

Indian borders. As Netaji had to fall back from Imphal, it was the work of embarrassing the Indian Government and undermining the morale of their supporters which engaged the attention of his followers, who kept themselves ready to engage in open warfare if the opportunity came.

In their work of sabotage, the B.V. people found an unexpected ally in large sections of what Netaji with a touch of scorn had called the Gandhi Wing—orthodox *khadi*-clad people wedded to non-violence and the not-so-orthodox followers of Gandhi who called themselves Socialists, or Congress Socialists. As one reviews the incidents in retrospect, one is struck by growing signs of the hardening attitude of Gandhiji's followers and the blurring of the distinction between non-violence and resistance that could not be called passive. Always soft-spoken, Mahatmaji at first posited an 'orderly withdrawal' of the British from India, but soon his language became more forthright and even strident: 'I cannot wait any longer for Indian freedom. I cannot wait until Mr Jinnah is converted . . . This is the last struggle of my life.'<sup>107</sup> No longer any repetition of a Chauri-Chaura-like retreat or any insistence on the urgency of Harijan uplift or of even Hindu-Muslim unity as a weapon of the freedom struggle! So 'orderly withdrawal' was soon coupled with a peremptory direction to the British to 'Quit India'. The phrase was not Mahatmaji's,<sup>108</sup> but he later on adopted it, and while reaffirming his faith in non-violence, he laid all responsibility for the disturbances on the Government that had met a people's just demands with repression which bred bitterness (letter to Home Secretary, 23.9.42). Here was a new note, more characteristic, except for the reference to non-violence, of Subhas than of Gandhi. And the leadership also passed to a newer set of men and women—to Jayaprakash Narayan, the Congress Socialist, who openly disavowed his faith in non-violence, Achyut Patwardhan who set up a parallel government in Satara, to Aruna Asaf Ali who went underground to organize a network of subversive activity throughout the country, to Matangini Hazra, the illiterate village widow, who, abjuring her life of peaceful, constructive activity on Gandhian lines, proceeded to occupy a police station in a remote corner of Midnapore and heroically faced the police bullets which killed her.

The difference between violence and non-violence in the new situation was more or less an academic question. In 1921 and 1930 students were asked not to attend schools, and they were sought to be persuaded through peaceful picketing, much as alcoholics might be prevented by non-violent volunteers from buying liquor. If that was then legitimate activity, equally legitimate was it at this stage to sit on the railway track in a non-violent manner to prevent the running of trains or even to cut off telegraph wires or indulge in similar activities in order to persuade the British to make an orderly withdrawal from India.

Lord Linlithgow assured H.M.G. that the Quit India movement had been suppressed and all was right in India. But such complacency was based on what was only apparent. The wave which had violently ruffled the surface might have subsided, but the subterranean stream was daily gaining in volume and velocity and would burst forth again and again, and no force on earth could resist it. 'The "August Disturbances", as they were euphemistically called', says Hugh Tinker, himself an Indian Civil Service man of those days, 'marked the lowest point in British-Indian relations. All communication seemed to be severed. Only bitterness and suspicion remained.'<sup>109</sup> I vividly remember a day in 1946 when I was travelling by train to Rajshahi from Calcutta. We were comfortably perched in our compartments, the guard had whistled his signal but the train would not move. Looking out of the window, I found that the station was a vast sea of human heads and heard that Aruna Asaf Ali had come out of hiding and had entrained in a rear bogie. The word had gone round and the whole of Calcutta seemed to have rushed to greet one of the leaders of the 1942 movement. As the train slowly steamed off, telepathic messages seemed to have passed from one big station to another. There were similar crowds and equally tumultuous welcomes at every big station where the train was due to halt. I had never seen anything so spontaneous and yet so vast and so overwhelming. By the time we reached the river Padma and the bridge—then called the Hardinge Bridge after a British Viceroy—spanning it, we had missed the connecting train. As I passed the night on the platform musing on the unforgettable experience of the day and on the many such incidents that were happening all over

the country, I wondered how the sun would frown on Britain's Indian empire on the morrow.

#### IV

From Aruna Asaf Ali and her triumphant return to public life in 1946, we may well look back at August 1942—the Quit India Resolution, the incarceration of Gandhiji and his Working Committee, the extensive disturbances, the suppression of the rebellion and the self-complacency of the British authorities. But all these were overshadowed by what was happening outside India. Subhaschandra had reached Berlin via Moscow in March 1941, but he was not quite happy with the turn of events in the world at large. The concord and discord between the warlords of Europe, America and Asia were like the alliances and enmities of brigands, all matters of convenience. There was, before the War had broken out, the Comintern or Communist International presided over by Russia, and as a counterblast to it there was the Anti-Comintern under the aegis of Germany, Japan and Italy. For a while the lines seemed to be clearly drawn between communist and anti-communist forces, when suddenly the leading exponents of the two camps, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, entered into a Non-aggression Pact (August 1939), and Hitler felt so triumphant that he embarked on a European war. Subhaschandra desired that India should exploit England's predicament to her own advantage. One of the secret clauses of the German-Soviet Pact, of which Subhaschandra probably knew nothing, stipulated that India would fall within the Russian 'sphere of influence'! Russia, not yet willing to rub Britain the wrong way, was not eager to extend active support to Subhaschandra. On the other hand, Hitler had decided as far back as June 1940 that he would embark on 'Operation Barbarossa' by which he meant an invasion of Russia. The Russian invasion came off on 22 June 1941 within three months of Subhaschandra's arrival in Berlin. Now all his hopes rested on Germany inflicting a crushing defeat on Russia so that, on the heels of the German army and as Germany's ally, he might march into India at the head of his own troops. But that hope also was dashed to the ground when the German advance was halted at Stalingrad in Novem-

ber 1942. Subhaschandra's last hope in the West rested on an Axis victory in Africa, but there too it was doomed to disappointment after Montgomery's decisive victory at El Alamein, which almost synchronized with the German debacle at Stalingrad.

Apart from these setbacks, Subhaschandra could not, for other reasons also, feel very happy about his position and prospects in Germany. Hitler had too many irons in the fire to think seriously of an advance into India, which was far removed from the theatres of war in which his forces were engaged, and everywhere his spectacular early successes had been followed by a stalemate. He, therefore, wanted to use Subhaschandra chiefly as a propaganda weapon—for anti-British broadcasts and, when necessary, as a bargaining counter in negotiations with the British. But Subhaschandra looked for much more, and he had enough experience of politicians to know that he must beware of protectors who generally gobble up a good share of the victories of liberation. This is indeed too true, and in modern times it is only the India of Mrs Indira Gandhi and Field-Marshal Sam Manekshaw that won a decisive victory and yet did not annex any territory either from Pakistan or Bangladesh, though she might make out a plausible claim on both on the ground that the subcontinent had earlier been divided on the basis of religion and population and the non-Muslim minorities in both wings of Pakistan had in large numbers fled to India.

Right from the beginning Subhaschandra determined that he must be recognized as the Head of an independent state—President of the Provisional Government of Free India or something similar to that—and he must have an army of his own, with its own officers and commanders, that would fight side by side with the armies of the Axis powers as an ally. Although Japan was willing to accord him that status, Hitler was not, and Mussolini never counted for much. Hitler consented only to pay an allowance to Subhaschandra and his staff from the funds of the Foreign Office, thereby according him such recognition as payment under this head might imply, and he would go no further. Disappointed but not daunted, Subhaschandra proceeded to form a Legion of armed men, the nucleus of an army, from Indian prisoners of war in Germany and other Central European countries, and he expected a continuous flow of such

recruits from North Africa. But the North African supply soon dwindled into a trickle and the Legion only enabled Subhaschandra to learn how to grapple with the problems of raising an army unit. Otherwise it was not of much account, and when Subhaschandra left Germany, the Legion maintained a kind of precarious existence and then disintegrated after Hitler's downfall.

Subhaschandra had a small band of very faithful workers in Germany—Abid Hasan, Swamy and Nambiar—and although the Indian Legion of about 2,000 recruits was numerically insignificant, Subhaschandra always commanded the respect of his hosts for his personality, organizational ability and unflinching devotion to his cause. But in Germany he had come to a dead end, and he noted with disappointment and chagrin that from September 1942 onwards his soldiers were required to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler! Even before this he had decided on facing one more hazard and making a journey to Japan where, he rightly thought, he would be more useful and successful. It took eight months before a fairly safe passage could be arranged for him; land and air routes were ruled out and a blockade-running sea-going vessel was not safe. So his Japanese friend, Military Attaché Colonel Yamamoto, suggested a journey by a submarine, and that was accepted. Here is a pithy and graphic account of the critical venture, based on Hugh Teye: On 8 February 1943, Subhaschandra Bose and Abid Hasan took a German U-boat at Kiel and sailing down the Atlantic passed the Cape of Good Hope to a place four hundred miles SSW of Madagascar. From here they went by a rubber dinghy to a Japanese submarine by which they went across the Indian Ocean to Sabang at the northern tip of Sumatra, from where along with his old friend Colonel Yamamoto who had arrived there earlier from Germany, they flew to Tokyo after a perilous, dull and occasionally exciting journey of eighteen weeks.<sup>110</sup>

## V

Subhaschandra reached the right place, but not at the right time.<sup>111</sup> Japan had for a long time been trying to extend her influence in the eastern world through an association which she

called the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Even when her relations with Great Britain were peaceful, she had granted asylum to the fugitive Indian revolutionary Rashbihari Bose. Rashbihari, who had begun organizing revolutionaries as far back as 1926, established the Indian Independence League in Japan in 1939 and became its first President. In October 1941 a Japanese army officer, Fujiwara, set up a secret intelligence mission at Bangkok, allying himself with Prittam Singh, an Indian revolutionary. In the meantime, branches of the Indian Independence League had mushroomed in Thailand and in other countries in East Asia, and the achievement of freedom for India became a live issue with the Indian community and their sympathizers in these lands. When Japan entered the Second World War on 5 December 1941, Fujiwara's intelligence mission, hitherto a secret organization, came out into the open. Prittam Singh having died in an air accident, the leadership of the mission was now shared by Rashbihari Bose who had his headquarters in Tokyo and General Mohan Singh, a British Indian army officer captured in the Malayan jungles. A fervent patriot who set the country above race and religion, Mohan Singh started the first Indian National Army on 1 January 1942 in a school building at Ipoh in Malaya. He had told Fujiwara about the great Indian leader Subhaschandra Bose, then vegetating in Germany, and had emphasized the urgency of bringing Bose over to the eastern theatre of war. Some Japanese efforts seem to have been made in this direction, but Hitler was unwilling to hand over such a valuable asset to Japan, who was an ally no doubt but also a rival. There were large concentrations of Indians in Burma and other areas of East Asia, and everywhere there was a demand for Subhaschandra who was regarded as a hero and had almost become a legend. This area also provided a very fruitful field for the kind of experiment that Netaji<sup>112</sup>— as he should now be called— wanted to make, which was to raise an army out of prisoners of war. Eighty per cent of the British forces at Singapore, for example, were Indian, and when on 15 February 1942 the British Army there capitulated, there were fifty thousand Indian soldiers who formed a fertile field for the recruiting agents of the Indian Independence League. But the situation had its snags too. There were murmurs of suspicion amongst the Indian com-

munity about the intentions of the Japanese. 'What about Manchuria?' asked some. On the other hand, the Japanese had their misgivings about Indians with their differences of caste, religion and race. More importantly, as Joyce Lebra points out, the Japanese army was unwilling to see the I.N.A. evolve into a regular fighting force partly because of the problems of equipping such a large army, but chiefly because of the uncertainty about the possible attitude of such an army, once the Indian border was crossed.<sup>113</sup>

The most embarrassing development, however, was the growing friction between Indians in South Asia and those in Tokyo, who were suspected to be Japanese puppets. This simmering distrust developed into an open breach between the I.N.A. under Mohan Singh and the Independence League headed by Rashbihari Basu. Matters came to such a pass that in December 1942 Rashbihari Bose dismissed Mohan Singh, thus effecting the collapse of the first I.N.A., which afterwards maintained a precarious existence for some time under Lt. Col. Bhonsle. At a conference held in Bangkok in June 1942 Rashbihari Bose urged the Japanese to grant recognition to his Independence League as the Government of Free India, but Premier Tojo considered the demand preposterous. Thus the Indian Independence movement was flickering out and the strength of the I.N.A. had dwindled from 45,000 to only 8,000.

It was at this juncture that Japan insisted on Subhaschandra being sent to the eastern theatre, and Rashbihari Bose also agreed to surrender all power and authority to him. Hitler now agreed to this transfer, and after a long and arduous voyage Subhaschandra reached Japan and called on Premier Tojo. It seemed as if a magic wand had been wafted over the whole area which with one voice acclaimed Subhas as Netaji, an epithet which has stuck to him as firmly as Mahatmajai to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Soon after his arrival Japan declared the achievement of full freedom by India as one of her war aims and recognized the Provisional Government of Free India which was established on 21 October 1943 with Netaji as its head. Tojo not only transferred to it the territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands but also accredited an Ambassador to Netaji who had now formed his cabinet. The new Government won recognition from several countries; De Valera even sent his



personal congratulations. All dissensions were forgotten and a new I.N.A., puissant and patriotic, arose out of the ashes of the old. Monetary assistance began to flow in freely to fill the new Government's coffers as fresh recruits swelled the ranks of its army. I do not think there are many parallels in history to such a tumultuous welcome or such unswerving loyalty as Netaji received, and there are few parallels also to such a large army as he raised mostly out of prisoners of war. No doubt there were occasional instances of extortion and torture, and of desertion also as victory seemed to recede further and further. There were, moreover, minor dissensions between the Japanese military command and the I.N.A. authorities as also between the soldiers of the two allied armies. Yet the I.N.A. on the whole worked as a cohesive unit of 35,000 fighting men with 15,000 under training.

But the Imphal campaign on which Netaji now embarked with what appeared to be such effective backing and which aroused so much excitement and enthusiasm was foredoomed to failure; as Waterloo was implicit in Elba. If Netaji had been able to cross over to Japan in 1942 when the Japanese army was marching into Burma, he might have made his way to India; and if he had once established himself in Indian territory, it would have been difficult to dislodge a leader so dear to the vast population of the subcontinent. Indeed, even when all seemed to be over and Slim's army was already penetrating into Burma, he appealed to the Japanese that if they could once place him and his men on Indian soil through Imphal or Chittagong, there was no doubt that the people would rise in arms to receive him and his ultimate victory would be certain. But that was not to be, and the reasons were far too complex for him to comprehend, far-sighted though he was.

Although he was a born leader with a magnetic personality, he was no military genius like Napoleon. But even Napoleon was overcome by circumstances and compelled to yield to inferior men like Wellington and Blücher. When Germany was winning victory after victory in Europe in the early days of the Second World War, Japan thought that Britain and America would have no army or arms to spare for the East, and she would be able easily to extend her sway over the Pacific and most of the islands in the Indian Ocean. But she did not know that she

was trying to bite off more than she could chew. A novel offensive strategy was initiated by the Japanese Navy Chief Admiral Yamamoto, who thought that the deciding factor in naval battles in modern times was the striking power of aircraft-carriers rather than conventional warships because 'the aeroplane outranged the gun'. By following this strategy he achieved quick success at Pearl Harbor and Singapore, but he did not reckon with three important factors. First, he was engaged in a contest with the two most well-equipped navies of the world, the British and the American, and Britain and America were also the two most industrialized countries of the world with almost inexhaustible resources. Moreover he did not realize that with Russia keeping the German army fully engaged in Europe, American forces would be released for extensive deployment in the eastern theatre. Neither did he know that America had somehow or other come into the possession of the secret codes used by the Japanese, whose moves the Allies could foreknow and forestall.

The result was that the Japanese onset in the Pacific Ocean was halted by three convincing defeats. There was the Battle of the Coral Sea, May 4-8, 1942, where the Japanese Navy suffered a reverse, although with the striking successes at Pearl Harbor and Singapore behind them Admiral Yamamoto and his staff were inclined to ignore it. But a more crippling defeat came a month after, in June 1942, when the Japanese attempt to attack and occupy Midway Island and the Aleutians was completely foiled in what was described by Admiral King, Chief of the U.S. Fleet, 'as the first decisive defeat suffered by the Japanese Navy in 350 years'.<sup>114</sup> After this Japan became weaker and weaker until her mainland became vulnerable to enemy attack, and the campaign initiated by General MacArthur was consolidated by allied victory early in 1943 in what is known as the Battle of Guadalcanal.

So when Subhaschandra embarked on the Imphal campaign, which was conceived in 1943 but launched in April 1944, he was really leading a forlorn hope. He told his soldiers that he could offer them 'nothing except hunger, thirst, privation, forced marches and death', but that if they followed him, he would lead them to victory and freedom. Yet even he had not full knowledge of the enormous difficulties awaiting him and his

men, for by the time his campaign began, the South East Asia Command of the Allies had established superiority in air power, and that nipped in the bud whatever hope of success the Indo-Japanese forces might initially have entertained. Netaji, who had wanted to fight till the last moment, agreed on 8 July 1944 to halt operations and retreat.

Yet as befitted a commander whom all loved and worshipped, Subhaschandra lost neither hope nor courage. Although he had issued orders for retreat and the Japanese themselves could no longer hold Burma, he flew to Bangkok and from there left for Taiwan. He had already sensed growing differences among the victors—America and Britain on the one hand and Russia on the other—differences that surfaced at the time of the Japanese surrender and a little earlier at the San Francisco Conference of April–June 1945 and have since crystallized into what is known as the Cold War. He hoped to make the most of these differences, utilizing them in the interests of Indian independence. With this end in view he decided to seek asylum in Russia, and the rest is silence.

Although he did not return, his main work had been done. He had given India an army—Indian, national and independent. When his soldiers who had been arrested were tried and condemned for treasonable offences, not a man dared to harm a hair of the head of any one of them. The affair of 1857 has been condemned as a series of sporadic disturbances. It has been whittled down to a mutiny of sepoys while others have hailed it as the first war of Indian independence. Probably the truth lies somewhere between these extreme views. After this, political agitation, sponsored largely by the Congress, had been reformist and non-violent. Mahatma Gandhi, who had made *ahimsa* a religion, gave reformist agitation the dimensions of a revolution. Yet some people who did not believe in non-violence had tried from time to time to suborn the Indian Army on which Britain's Indian empire depended. Such men were Rashbihari Bose, Sachin Sanyal, Naren Chatterji, Naren Bose and, most notably, Jatin Mukherji, whom Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India (1910–16), could correctly assess. When forty-seven accused were being tried in the Howrah Conspiracy case in 1911, the Viceroy suggested that there should be only one charge—tampering with the loyalty of troops—and one accused—Jatindranath Mukh-

erji.<sup>115</sup> As is well known, Bagha Jatin, as he was popularly called, died in an open encounter with a contingent of the British army—possibly the first such engagement in the twentieth century. It was a heroic effort, but he had no army and no arms except the Mauser pistols looted from Rodda & Co. Subhaschandra gave India her first national army; and in the Quit India movement and the Imphal campaign the two wings of the Indian struggle for freedom met—the Gandhi Wing and the Netaji Wing, and that in itself was a consummation devoutly to be wished.

In one respect Subhaschandra had an edge over Gandhiji and that was in welding different races and creeds into a unity. Mahatmaji made a cardinal blunder in linking the Indian freedom movement to the 'trans-Himalayan' question of the Caliphate with which the majority of Indians had nothing to do, and that is why it was easy for the British to lure away the Muslims as soon as the Caliphate was abolished, and the movement initiated by him in 1920–21 ended up by dividing India into two (and now three) sections. But Subhaschandra made Indian freedom the only goal of Indians and therefore, although the Provisional Government formed by him and his Indian National Army were beset by many problems, there was no racial discrimination, sectarian quarrel or religious animosity. If he could have returned to his country to consolidate the freedom he had pledged his life to wrest, India would not have been divided.

## Finale

In *The Apple Cart* Bernard Shaw makes the somewhat disconcerting suggestion that the rebellious American colonies might now repent the decision they made under the leadership of Washington and that, like the Prodigal Son, they might want to return to the mother country. A creative genius is also a prophet; in 1929 Bernard Shaw only impishly forecasted a politico-economic arrangement that was to come off twelve years later when Britain played second fiddle to the United States of America, for whom she would be no more than a pensioner. In December 1941, when America was not a belligerent, the U.S. Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act, authorizing President Roosevelt to lease or lend equipment to any nation whose defence the President deemed vital to the interests of America. After this Great Britain became a borrower, and America as the lender had the upper hand in everything; and even when later on Harry Truman terminated the Lend-Lease Act, England came in as one of the chief beneficiaries of the Marshall Aid Programme. Economists say that one of the results of the Lend-Lease Act was that it enabled America to drive out Britain from the export market, and Britain became a relatively second-rate power in spite of her being one of the chief architects of a smashing Allied victory.

Politically, the results were equally significant and, perhaps, somewhat comical. A one-eyed giant, Winston Churchill did not realize that the Imperial stance and a beggar's bowl go ill together. Churchill did not approve of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's visit to India and somewhat scornfully turned down the Generalissimo's proposal that President Roosevelt be asked to mediate in Britain's dispute with India, because that would interfere with the sovereign right of His Majesty the King-

Emperor (II, no. 637). He lectured both the Generalissimo and the President on the racial diversity, communal animosity and other incompatibilities in India which, according to him, made transfer of power difficult and negotiation with Gandhi's Congress undesirable. I think somewhere in the shades the Generalissimo and President Roosevelt must now be pointing to separatist tendencies in Scotland, communal disturbances in the two Irelands, the objections of Scotsmen to calling the reigning English Queen Elizabeth II, and the hesitations of Welshmen to recognize her son and heir as the Prince of Wales!

Unfortunately, Churchill and his immediate circle were blind to the new situation brought about by the War. In the so-called Atlantic Charter agreed upon by Roosevelt and Churchill on 9-12 August 1941, an announcement was made guaranteeing the rights of the people to choose their own government, but Churchill on his own hastened to explain it away by saying that the Charter did not apply to India and other non-European countries. When Roosevelt was questioned on the subject, he brushed the issue aside, saying that there were only discussions which were not committed to writing. Not content with giving this indirect rebuff, the President now began to put pressure on the Prime Minister to settle the Indian question. 'Though not known at the time', says Maulana Azad, 'President Roosevelt, immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, requested the British Government that Indian leaders should be conciliated.'<sup>116</sup> The most important result of this pressure was the Cripps Mission sent early in 1942, which coincided with a visit by the President's representative Louis Johnson, whose presence, as I have said earlier, was resented but had to be tolerated. The proposal brought by Sir Stafford Cripps was rejected because it offered some kind of freedom to be granted after the War, but said nothing about the present. Another and a greater objection was the option given to the Provinces to stay outside the Union of India. The Mission failed and Churchill was jubilant, but his jubilation was short-lived.

The most crushing comment on the proposal brought by Cripps was made by the American President, whose opinion was communicated to Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office: '... he [President] thought that we had made mistakes in connexion with the offer

to India carried by Sir Stafford. As he had told the latter before he started, we should not offer parts of India a right to secede, which, after the Civil War, sounded "terrible" to an American mind. Nor should we have held out the idea that after the War a constituent body should be summoned with the right to produce a final constitution (including right of secession) which His Majesty's Government forthwith undertook to accept: It would have been better to follow the example of the American Colonies, which first produced an interim system and then after experience of a few years' trial and error settled a final constitution which has remained ever since' (II, no. 424). Mahatma Gandhi is said to have described the Cripps offer as 'a postdated cheque'; some people say that his full phrase was 'a postdated cheque on a failing crashing bank'. A more pointed description would be—'a postdated cheque on a bank mortgaged to America'. If our external affairs experts were more knowledgeable and a little less anxious to grasp at power, they might have utilized American assistance and preserved the unity of India. •

Men like Winston Churchill are quick to learn but very slow to unlearn. The American criticism of the British policy with regard to India, however, became more and more strident, and this could not but make its impact on the British public too. There were other reasons also for a change in British public opinion and attitude which will be taken up in the appropriate context. What is relevant here is that when in 1944 a general election seemed to be approaching, Churchill felt that he must make a gesture to India to soften American criticism and also to satisfy those sections of the British electorate who were not interested in the Indian empire. After the Labour and Liberal members of the Cabinet resigned in May 1945 on the termination of hostilities in Europe, Churchill and Amery, the Secretary of State for India, authorized, on their own, Viceroy Lord Wavell to form an Executive Council composed entirely of Indians, and the proposals were laid before a large Conference of Indian leaders at Simla in June 1945. But the devil had not forgotten his wiles. The Muslim League was invited to participate in this Conference and so were the Sikhs, the Scheduled Castes, the European group in the Central Legislature and even the tiny Nationalist Party, but not the Hindu Mahasabha. Here was an

ill-concealed attempt to prove what Churchill had been saying all these years that Gandhi and the Congress represented only upper class Hindus, that the Scheduled Castes were a separate religious entity like the Sikhs or the Muslims, and that the Muslim League was the sole representative of the Muslims. The hint was not lost on Jinnah who made the unequivocal demand that he must nominate all the five Muslim members of the Executive Council, although the League was not in power in four of the states claimed by Jinnah for Pakistan. Needless to say that the Conference broke down on this issue. Churchill thought that he had trounced the seditious Indian Fakir and outwitted the officious American President, but he was soon undeceived; for immediately after the failure of the Simla Conference (June 1945), his party was trounced in the general election (5-26 July 1945) and it was now the turn of Indians to dance in joy as Churchill had danced after the failure of the Cripps Mission.

## II

When Clement Attlee assumed office as Prime Minister of a Labour Government with a massive mandate—it was not like Ramsay MacDonald's 'phoney' Labour Ministry—not only was the War nearing its end but the vision of a new world was looming large. Slowly and steadily England had seen the dawning of a new ideal that was incompatible with the concept of imperialism, or with the cant of the white man's burden, which, ridiculous as it may sound, made Churchill worry even about what might happen to the hapless Indian policeman if the British quitted India.

The new ideal was the ideal of the Welfare State, evolved after years of agitation on the economic and political fronts. It did not matter how wide the Empire was or whether the Empire existed at all, if only the state could provide free education, health and maternity services, food subsidies and full employment to all its citizens at home. To achieve these goals, the first priority had to be given to the task of reconstructing the economy which had been badly shaken and damaged by about six years of war. And this in part called for quick repatriation and demobilization of all military and defence personnel who had



lived a hard life far away from their own people and were now so eager to return home that, though thousands were being daily repatriated, there were reports of frequent riots at demobilization centres. In this context the lure of defending and governing a far-flung empire and its distant colonies seemed to be very weak indeed.

The task of national reconstruction was a formidable one. Apart from the adverse effect of the Lend-Lease Act on British exports, to which reference has already been made, the prospect in economic terms was too sombre to be relieved by the flaunting of Churchill's 'V' sign. Some random figures would tell their own tale. 'War damage at home and to shipping', says Calvocoressi, 'amounted to some £3 billion. . . . The external debt increased by £3.3 billion. . . . The balance sheet position was cruelly disappointing, the on-going situation daunting. A nation which had for generations drawn its livelihood from trade had been forced by a war to stop making the goods which foreigners would buy in exchange for their own products. . . .' The only way out was borrowing on a large scale—to the tune of £1700 million—'in order to ensure a basic food ration and restocking and retooling of industry', and the only source was the U.S.A. The borrowing expedition was led by England's greatest economist Lord Keynes, and although like all money-lenders America imposed hard conditions, the borrower had to accept them.<sup>117</sup>

It was a heroic effort that the Labour Government now made to give a new shape to the economy, but there was nothing grandiose or grandiloquent about it. Prime Minister Attlee, his Chancellor Hugh Dalton and his Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin—all set their hands to the task of economic development and reconstruction undistracted by imperialist dreams. They had left Winston Churchill behind them and drew their inspiration from Sir William Beveridge who had drawn up an outline of the Welfare State.<sup>118</sup> The ideal the new Government set before them is succinctly and pointedly expressed by Calvocoressi who may be quoted again: 'What was firm was the determination to secure two things: full employment for those of working age and capacity; and, for those who could not work because they were too young or too old or permanently or temporarily ill, safeguards and services in cash or in kind suf-

ficient to abolish poverty and ensure a minimum standard of living.'<sup>119</sup>

Since these urgent tasks absorbed the attention of Attlee's government, it is no wonder that the Indian problem took a low priority in the thinking of the leaders of the British Labour Party. In fact they forgot that if there was to be a basic constitutional change in India, there should be a change in the Viceregal Palace too. Lord Wavell, although not a favourite of Churchill, was tainted with Churchillian imperialism, and he had been associated as Commander-in-Chief with Linlithgow's 'obnoxious' regime. In spite of a testimonial from Maulana Azad, Wavell was a much disliked man and deservedly so. When the Congress leaders came out of jail in 1945, they found that although the Viceroy did not accept Jinnah's claim that as President of the Muslim League he should have the right to nominate all the five Muslim members of the Executive Council, he did not also, obviously out of deference to Jinnah's wishes, proceed to constitute the Executive Council on his own. This at once made him suspect in the eyes of nationalist Indians who raised a hue and cry, and Attlee found that Wavell's policy ran counter to his own. Attlee was keen on immediately handing over power to Indians and making an early withdrawal from India whereas Wavell felt that basic constitutional changes might wait for some time until the communal tension eased. Attlee's objective, however, remained in the background for some time. The Labour Government had come to power at the end of July 1945, and Wavell went to consult the newly formed Indo-Burman Committee of the Cabinet in September. On return he made a statement which did not satisfy anyone, because it did not in effect go beyond the Cripps proposals. A chip of the old block, Wavell did not understand, before the appointment of the Cabinet Mission and Attlee's speech on 15 March 1946, that imperialism was dead as the dodo.

However, on return to India Lord Wavell took the significant step of ordering a general election to the Provincial Legislatures in 1946, which brought into focus the predominance of the Muslim League amongst Muslims and of the Congress amongst non-Muslims. But although so much had been done to boost the Muslim League and accord Jinnah a position equivalent to Gandhi's, the election results did not justify Jinnah's claim to

Pakistan. While the League won 439 out of a total of 496 Muslim seats, the Congress and its allies bagged 21 out of 38 Muslim seats in N.W.F.P. and also a majority of seats in Assam. So there could be no justification for a claim to include these two provinces in Pakistan. In Punjab too the League could not gain an absolute majority. Thus although Churchill and Linlithgow had cried themselves hoarse over the interests of the Muslims, the results of the election, while flattering to the League, did not lend support to Jinnah's demand for the creation of Pakistan. Jinnah himself was not unaware of the weakness of his position, for in the Pakistan resolution of 1940 he had carefully inserted a proviso that the North-Western and Eastern States should become 'autonomous and sovereign' 'with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary', thus paving the way for what Syamaprasad Mookerjee would call the 'partitioning of Pakistan', that is to say, the division of Punjab and Bengal.

### III

After his policy statement of 15 March 1946 Prime Minister Attlee made two important moves to settle the Indian problem. He sent a Cabinet Delegation, consisting of Pethick-Lawrence, Stafford Cripps and A. V. Alexander in March 1946 and later replaced Viceroy Lord Wavell by Lord Mountbatten. On 16 May the Cabinet Mission submitted their proposals for the solution of the constitutional problem in what is now known as the long-term Plan which proved abortive. Proceeding on different lines, Lord Mountbatten devised a solution which was both a triumph and a tragedy. If the Delegation's Plan was in turn accepted and rejected by the National Congress and the Muslim League, it was largely due to a basic flaw in the Delegation's approach, and Jawaharlal Nehru has been unjustly blamed by friends and opponents alike for his indiscreet press conference on 10 July 1946 at which, soon after assuming office as Congress President, he declared that the Congress had accepted nothing in the Plan except the proviso about joining the Constituent Assembly. Never accustomed to precise thinking on complicated constitutional issues, he did go beyond permissible limits when he watered down the Working Committee's

Resolution of 24–26 June 1946 (later ratified by the A.I.C.C.), which said that the Congress accepted the proposals, reserving its freedom to interpret controversial clauses in its own way. It was with a similar reservation that the Muslim League also accepted them, as was pointed out by Attlee himself in a pithy reply to an angry letter from Jinnah: ‘... the terms of the Congress acceptance certainly leave something to be desired. But I must point out that the Muslim League, in their Resolution of the 6th June, had also made certain reservations’ (VIII, no. 70).

Abul Kalam Azad takes some credit for his part in bringing the negotiations with the Delegation to a successful conclusion and blames his ‘friend and comrade’ Jawaharlal for his hasty effusions at the 10 July press conference.<sup>120</sup> But although the Maulana might negotiate and Nehru might expostulate, the key figure even then was Gandhiji who had lost neither his clairvoyance nor his firmness and who seems to have at this time acquired a new inspiration from the example of Subhaschandra Bose. As Pethick-Lawrence, the leader of the Delegation, noted, Gandhiji saw him and Cripps on 18 May 1946, two days after the publication of the Plan and pointed out the inconsistencies between its different paragraphs and clauses. Pethick-Lawrence, who gave a faltering reply, was soon to admit the weakness of his position and to recognize the cogency of Gandhiji’s arguments so far as Assam was concerned (VIII, no. 317). Mahatmaji was even more forthright with Viceroys Wavell, who countered by saying that he was ‘a plain man and a soldier’ who did not know the law. If Wavell’s language the day before had been ‘minatory’, so was Gandhiji’s reply now, for he told the Viceroy that if they seriously meant to transfer power, they should realize that ‘the continued presence of a foreign power strong and proud of its arms’ would be an anomaly. He even administered a not very mild rebuke to the Viceroy about his plea of ignorance of law, saying that he should, in the discharge of his duties, be guided by people who knew the law as ‘some of us’, meaning himself amongst others, did. On another occasion (VIII, no. 385), he stated that when the two sides to a controversy were equally serious but diametrically opposed to each other, both could not be right, thereby hinting at the desirability of a reference to the Federal Court or the possibility of a

renewed confrontation. Elsewhere (VIII, no. 205) we find him administering a shock to Lord Wavell by saying that 'if a blood-bath was necessary, it would come about in spite of non-violence'. Such sentiments and such language show that after 1941 the gulf between Gandhiji and Subhas was daily growing narrower.

After these preliminary remarks it is necessary to examine the content of the Cabinet Mission Plan and see how and why it miscarried. As I have said earlier, Jawaharlal Nehru has been undeservedly blamed by friends and critics alike for the wrecking of a Plan that professed to preserve the unity of India while granting maximum autonomy to the Provinces, thus conceding the first two items in Jinnah's Fourteen Points scheme. So far the Plan, which reserved Defence, External Affairs and Communications for the Union Government and delegated all other subjects to the Provinces, was a straightforward document. But having for years pampered Jinnah and the Muslim League, the Delegation, which really had four members—the three Cabinet Ministers and the pro-Muslim Viceroy, could not abandon their protégé without providing some safeguards against the Hindu or non-Muslim majority. So they complicated their Plan by introducing the concept of 'Sections' and 'Groups'—the two words were not synonymous—in order to create solid Muslim blocs. The Provinces were to be divided into three Sections A, B and C: B comprising Punjab, N.W.F.P., Baluchistan and Sind, and C Bengal and Assam, and the remaining Provinces, where Muslims were very much in a minority, forming Section A. As this arrangement was suggested in the interest of Muslims, Section A was left out of account and all discussions and controversies were directed towards B and C. When several weeks after their return to England Pethick-Lawrence discovered that the political situation in India had reached a deadlock, he prepared a detailed note (VIII, no. 317) for the Prime Minister, in course of which he thus pinpointed the controversial clauses in the Plan prepared by them:

Paragraph 15(5): Provinces should be free to form Groups with Executives and Legislatures and each Group could determine the Provincial subjects to be taken in common.

Paragraph 19(v): The Sections shall proceed to settle the Provincial Constitution for the Provinces in each Section and shall also decide whether any Group Constitution shall be set up for those Provinces. . . . Provinces shall have power to opt out of Groups in accordance with the provisions of sub-clause (viii) below.

Paragraph 19(viii): As soon as the new constitutional arrangements have come into operation, it shall be open to any Province to elect to come out of any Group in which it has been placed. Such a decision shall be taken by the Legislatures of the Provinces after the first General election under the new constitution.

Earlier on 6 September (VIII, no. 268), while decrying as far-fetched the criticism that the Group constitution might preempt the exercise of free option by the Provinces, Pethick-Lawrence had himself admitted that with regard to Assam it was 'not a wholly unfounded objection'. The trouble indeed lay far deeper, and the Delegation should have been more careful both in formulating and in drafting their Plan. After their proposals were published on 16 May 1946, they held an expository press conference on 17 May, parrying objections and elucidating what might seem to be recondite or dubious. But on 18 May Gandhiji saw Pethick-Lawrence and Stafford Cripps and threw a bombshell, saying that 'the provision in paragraph 15(5) was basic and overrode the provision in paragraph 19(v)', and 'therefore, the correct interpretation was that if they liked, the Provinces might refuse from the outset to join any group which was set up'. The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution on 24 May reaffirming this view, and the Mission felt it necessary to clear up the position on this point publicly by announcing on 25 May that the Congress interpretation of paragraph 15 of the statement did not accord with the Delegation's intentions. But after about three weeks, on 15 June, the Viceroy thus assured Maulana Azad, who was then the Congress President: 'I would, however, point out that the statement of 16 May does not make grouping compulsory. It leaves the decision to the elected representatives of the Provinces sitting together in Sections' (VII, no. 541). This comes very near to the view expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru whose press conference Wavell

described as 'most unwise and provocative' (VIII, no. 493). Nehru summed up the Congress position once again in a broadcast on 7 September 1946: 'We are perfectly prepared to, and we have accepted the position, of sitting in Sections, which will consider the question of the formation of Groups.' In a compromise formula worked out by Lord Pethick-Lawrence, it was conceded that decisions in regard to Provincial constitutions should require a majority of the votes of the representatives of the Provinces, but this was contradicted by the rider that in matters affecting the Group constitution the decision must rest on the majority vote of the entire Section (VIII, no. 219). Thus there might be a clash of jurisdiction between the scope of one body and another, and the Secretary of State saw the necessity of referring such disputes to the Federal Court (VIII, no. 317, para 33). This the Congress had been emphasizing right from the beginning, but Jinnah, who felt, as a lawyer, that he might not carry the Court with him, would not agree to this on the ground that there was no provision in the Statement for its interpretation by the Federal Court (*ibid.*, para 20). This was an idle, flimsy objection, because all decisions by the Executive and all laws enacted by Legislatures may be interpreted by the Judiciary, and the Federal Court in particular was established in order that expert advice on constitutional questions might be obtained from a competent authority. In no. 366 of Volume VIII, Wavell notes that Jinnah proposes to refer some other controversies to the Federal Court for determination!

The Cabinet Mission documents bristle with ambiguities, ambivalences, confusions and contradictions, because the Delegation started from more than one wrong hypothesis. In his statement of 15 March Attlee said that minorities must be enabled to live free from fear, but a minority must not be allowed to place a veto on the advance of the majority. But the Delegation recognized two major communities, thus conferring on the Muslims who formed only 26-27 per cent of the population a status equal to that of the Hindus forming 64 per cent, or to that of all non-Muslims combined who formed over 73 per cent of the population; and it ignored all distinctions except that of religion. From this false starting point emanated other absurdities which were difficult to accept. Thus Punjab would be able to swallow N.W.F.P. which, however, in spite of its Muslim

majority, was clearly on the side of the nationalist Congress rather than with the communal Muslim League. In Assam less than a third of the population was Muslim, and yet in terms of the Delegation's Plan its political identity would be submerged under the weight of the vast Muslim majority of Bengal. It is not surprising that the Congress leadership should have 'reservations' about the proposed arrangement and therefore withdrew their support. Returning to England, Pethick-Lawrence consulted his Cabinet colleagues and also armed himself with the advice of Lord Chancellor Jowitt, who supported his interpretation that Provincial constitutions would be made in Sectional meetings where decisions would be taken by simple majority vote. This would be a windfall for Jinnah, but the Congress, with its commitments to preservation of national unity and provincial autonomy, could not accept it. Mahatma Gandhi exhorted Assam to stand up for her rights, but such advice had no effect, even when it came from Mahatmaji, who, incidentally, had ever since 1920 been harping on the necessity of placating Muslim hardliners. So the long-term Plan went by the board. Congress leadership should now have realized that they were back to square one, that is to say, where they were in 1942. But would they be able to put up 'one fight more/The best and the last'?

What strikes one as most absurd in these confabulations is the tenacity with which the Congress leadership stuck to the scheme of the Interim Government, which was part of a composite Plan and certainly less important than the long-term scheme to which it was a prelude. The anomaly did not escape the notice of H.M.G., who saw that once the Indian leaders got a taste of power, they would swallow any long-term scheme that might be pushed down their throats. Mahatmaji wrote to Wavell to say that if British arms were not withdrawn, the Interim Government would be a 'farce'. Wavell, who looked at the matter from a different point of view, knew that it was so and he enjoyed it too. He had refused to part with his special powers and he did not accept the Congress claim that the members of the Government had joint ministerial responsibility; yet in his communications to the Secretary of State he referred to the meetings of the Executive Council as meetings of the 'cabinet', obviously using



the word 'cabinet' with his tongue in his cheek. Within three weeks of the installation of the Interim Government, the Viceroy noted with alarm the proposal to send Krishna Menon at Government expense as the 'personal representative of the Vice-President' to European countries. Wavell himself considered it 'most ill-timed and ill-advised' (VIII, no. 357). On 27 October (VIII, no. 490), the Viceroy found Nehru unwilling to part with the External Affairs portfolio and unable to speak to Sardar Patel about his surrendering the Home portfolio; the Sardar in his turn had already expressed disappointment that his department did not embrace a larger area (VIII, no. 262). Could such men be expected to forgo the loaves and fishes of office and launch a struggle for an independent and united India?

#### IV

On 29 June 1946, without accomplishing anything very tangible the 'three wise men' who formed the Cabinet Mission left for England, and the Indian leaders began to act very unwisely. The Viceroy proceeded to appoint an Interim Executive Council, and Jinnah, relieved at having extricated himself from his commitment to the Cabinet Mission's proposal of a united India, renewed his claim that he must nominate all the Muslim members, but the Viceroy now not only turned down the claim but installed an Executive Council without including any nominee of the Muslim League. The members of the Muslim League, however, were not prepared to remain long in the wilderness. So Jinnah suppressed his indignation and in October sent in the names of his five nominees, one of them the insignificant Jogendranath Mandal! The Muslim League members rightfully claimed that one major portfolio should be given to the League. Now it was the turn of the Congress to act foolishly. To keep the Defence portfolio out of political squabbles, the Viceroy had given it to a Sikh who was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. If Jawaharlal Nehru was to play the role of a world figure, he must have External Affairs in which he claimed to be a specialist, and Sardar Patel would stake his life for the Home portfolio to which he had looked forward so longingly. So the

League got Finance, and the Sardar's discomfiture at the hands of Liaquat Ali Khan and Chaudhuri Mohammad Ali has been related so often that it need not be repeated here.

Neither Jawaharlal Nehru nor Sardar Patel felt quite at ease in the Executive Council. The former could not behave as Prime Minister, and the 'Iron Man' holding the Home portfolio found that his colleague in charge of the Finance portfolio was made of flint. The Budget presented by Liaquat Ali made such big holes in the purses of capitalists—most of them non-Muslims—that they would rather welcome the British back than enjoy the fruits of such independence. So the net effect of the Muslim League's entry into the Executive Council was that the two dominant figures on the Congress side, Nehru and Patel, were converted to the theory of Pakistan, because they felt that it would be more pleasant to reign in a truncated India than to wrangle in an unwieldy, heterogeneous subcontinent. As Gandhi had ceased to count and Maulana Azad failed to impress both Patel and Nehru, the only other man who stood for united India was, strangely enough, Lord Wavell. Before we pass on to the next stage it would be interesting to note how Jinnah in his own way contributed to the process of bungling initiated by Jawaharlal. After Jawaharlal's rambling press conference on 10 July 1946 referred to above, Jinnah withdrew his own acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan and made an unnecessarily provocative speech, asking his followers to observe 16 August 1946 as the Direct Action day. The connotation of the phrase 'Direct Action' was lost neither upon his followers nor upon the European officials who wanted to deliver the last blow to the Hindus who were forcing them to quit India. So the Direct Action day came to be known in history as the Great Calcutta Killing day. If after this Jinnah got only 'a maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan', he had largely himself to thank for it.

The Calcutta killings were followed by violence in the districts of Noakhali and Tipperah with repercussions in Bihar, and the whole of India was in an explosive state. Attlee found that no party in India had confidence in Lord Wavell who was not Attlee's nominee either, and Wavell's chief disqualification was that he wanted first to control the law and order situation and then arrange for orderly withdrawal of the British. This was

a proposition which nobody was willing to accept—not Attlee, and neither Nehru nor Jinnah. Jinnah would have liked the British to stay on and give him a corridor connecting the two wings of Pakistan. He made the proposal later on, but it fell on deaf ears.<sup>121</sup>

It was, therefore, necessary to have a new Viceroy who would replace Wavell and make a new 'personal approach' to the problems of India. This Viceroy was Lord Mountbatten who arrived in India and assumed charge of his duties in March 1947. Mountbatten and Nehru were so much attracted to each other that a rumour, possibly unfounded, began to spread that Nehru had a hand in this appointment. Their first meeting was interesting because it was profoundly ironical. If Nirad C. Chaudhuri<sup>122</sup> is to be believed, when Subhaschandra Bose marched towards India at the head of the I.N.A., Nehru proposed to go out and fight this army of fascists and save India for democracy, and it was Mountbatten who as Supreme Commander of South-East Asia beat the I.N.A. back. Yet the two first met when Nehru had gone to Malaya to unveil a memorial to the Indian National Army in February 1946 and Lord and Lady Mountbatten were his hosts. Here to 'everyone's surprise', writes Dorothy Norman, 'Lord Mountbatten declared that he would escort Nehru to the memorial meeting for the I.N.A.'<sup>123</sup> Mountbatten and Nehru marching together to an I.N.A. memorial was a sight for the gods to see.

Mountbatten was handsome, vigorous, impressive but also insidious and callous. He had, Nehru said, a 'dangerous charm', and Nehru was one of its captives. Nehru always needed a mentor. First it was his father, then Gandhiji, and now this Mariner held him in thrall, reminding us of Coleridge's poem. Mountbatten had a veneer of Fabian socialism, but beneath it he was a British aristocrat, the great-grandson of Queen Victoria; and he cared more for his efficiency than for the welfare of Indians. If he had come to accomplish the dissolution of the Empire, he did not seem to have minded at all if in the process about two million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs lost their lives and many more millions were uprooted from their homes and lost all they had. Hugh Tinker correctly describes the difference between the outgoing and incoming Viceroys when he says that 'Wavell had consistently opposed any dismemberment of India

while within a few weeks Mountbatten had conceded the inevitability of Pakistan.<sup>124</sup> This was because he sensed immediately that if he granted a mutilated Pakistan, it would satisfy Jinnah and the Muslim League because it was Pakistan, and it would flatter the vanity of the Congress leaders because they would have a large, if somewhat truncated, country to govern with undisputed sway. Half-German and half-British, Mountbatten did not understand national patriotism, and his callousness was matched by the cupidity of the Indian leaders who, as Gandhiji ruefully noted, were 'running after power.'<sup>125</sup>

Attlee made two statements about the form of the Government that would emerge in India. His speech in Parliament on 2 February 1947 seemed to be a plea for the division of India but the letter which he wrote to Mountbatten in March stipulated that it was 'the definite objective of the H.M.G. to obtain a *unitary* government for British India and the Indian States' (*italics mine*),<sup>126</sup> and that the target date of British withdrawal was 1 June 1948. The Viceroy he sent was just the man for this task, because he was set on speedy action and was not hampered by sentimental scruples. There can be no question as to his abilities; he had commanded the Allied forces in the eastern theatre of war, had managed the orderly reconquest of vast areas under Japanese occupation, but he had also had sufficient warning about the trouble that might occur in Punjab and Bengal. And violence did occur on an enormous scale in Punjab and partly also in Delhi and Bengal. It will be unnecessary to make here an inquest into this violent episode in Indian history or assess the damage to life, property and human values. Of the prominent leaders Jinnah, it has been said, was busy quarrelling over the division of assets down to the last typewriter ribbon,<sup>127</sup> and the only contribution Sardar Patel seems to have made was that when Sir Evan Jenkins, the Punjab Governor, suggested the arrest of Master Tara Singh, the Home Member vetoed it! Jawaharlal tried heroically to save the lives of Muslims trapped in Delhi, but by then the carnage was almost over. The full and ultimate responsibility rested squarely on the shoulders of the Viceroy who had unnecessarily advanced the date of British withdrawal without making adequate security arrangements. The freedom that he imposed has been aptly described as

'Freedom at Midnight'—the sun of freedom eclipsed by the darkness of midnight massacres.

Mountbatten had another gift to make before leaving India—this time not as a British Viceroy but as Governor-General of an autonomous Dominion. It was a Greek gift which Nehru accepted with characteristic gullibility. This was Mountbatten's suggestion of a plebiscite in Kashmir under the auspices of the United Nations Organization.

It would be unnecessary to rake up the history of Kashmir or to cite the parallel problems of Junagad and Hyderabad. In Kashmir the Maharajah, after long hesitation, acceded to India on 26/27 October 1947, and India sent troops to the state to ward off the Pakistan-sponsored invasion which had started a few days earlier. Since by virtue of the accession Kashmir had become a part of India like other acceding states, the Government of India were at complete liberty to maintain law and order there and drive away infiltrators whose onset Indian troops stemmed, and stemmed quickly. It was Mountbatten, now entrenched as Nehru's mentor and evil genius, who on 1 November first suggested a plebiscite, and then a plebiscite under U.N. auspices, because this valiant naval commander was afraid of the dispute developing into a full-scale war between India and Pakistan; and it was under his pressure that 'Nehru ultimately accepted the suggestion, though some of his colleagues had misgivings about the wisdom of the step'.<sup>128</sup> On 31 December the Government finally appealed to the United Nations, with what results everybody knows.

But for this appeal to the U.N. on an issue which was a domestic affair, Indian troops would have easily driven the invaders away, and nothing more would have been heard of the dispute. As it is, the Kashmir problem has become a permanent sore in the Indian body politic, and a very unpleasant side-effect has been our irrevocable dependence on the Russian veto, which makes our policy of non-alignment look somewhat comical.

## V

In the crucial policy statement which Attlee made on 15 March 1946 he said, amongst other things, that 'the tempera-

ture of 1946 is not the temperature of 1920 or of 1930 or even of 1942'. Maulana Azad quotes this sentence, but with his vision blinkered by the 'negotiations' he had carried on all his life, he does not try to probe its significance which may be examined at some depth. 'Nothing', Attlee proceeded to say, 'increases more the pace of the movement of public opinion than a great war.' Attlee then referred to the exhilarating effect of the First World War on Indian aspirations, but he did not mention the negatively and almost negative response these aspirations evoked—the spoonful of reforms embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919 following the obnoxious Rowlatt Act, not to speak of the Amritsar massacre. Attlee went on to refer to his illuminating experience as member of the Simon Commission but once again beat about the bush, for he forgot to mention that the Simon Commission led by gradual steps to the Communal Award and the retrograde Government of India Act of 1935, of which the most notorious feature was the weight it gave to Europeans!

After meandering this way and that, Attlee at last came to the most important aspect of the 'temperature of 1946' when he said that the Indian soldiers were imbued with the spirit of nationalism! 'Today I think that the national idea has spread right through and not least, perhaps, among those soldiers who have given such wonderful services in the war.'<sup>129</sup> Here Attlee came very near to the point and then hedged away from it. The Indian Army had played a notable part on the Western Front and, I think, a more significant part in the Battle of El Alamein, but all these were over by 1942. Then what did Attlee mean by the change between the temperature of 1942 and the temperature of 1946? To this there is only one answer which the Prime Minister could not make at that time before Parliament for fear of raising a hornet's nest. The most tangible—and to Englishmen a somewhat disconcerting—exhibition of Indian patriotism was the huge Indian National Army raised in a short time by Subhaschandra Bose out of the Indian soldiers captured by the Japanese, to which, when one considers its size and the heroic struggle it put up, there is probably no parallel in military history.

How puzzlingly novel this experiment was is borne out by the comments made by Field-Marshal Auchinleck, Commander-in-

Chief of the Indian Army, after the I.N.A. trials: 'There is no doubt at all from the mass of evidence we have that Subhaschandra Bose acquired a tremendous influence and that his personality must have been an exceedingly strong one . . .' (26 November 1945). 'I do not think any senior British Officer today knows what is the real feeling among Indian ranks regarding the Indian National Army. I myself feel, from my own instinct largely, but also from the information I had from various sources, that there is a growing feeling of sympathy for the I.N.A. . . . It is impossible to apply the standards of ethics to this problem or to shape our policy as we would had the I.N.A. been men of our own race' (22 January 1946).<sup>130</sup>

Apart from the impact of the I.N.A. on the people and the Government, there were at this time signs of serious disaffection in the Indian Navy. In Bombay three thousand sailors mutinied on board their ships and in barracks ashore on 18 February 1946; the Navy also mutinied at Calcutta and Madras, and more seriously at Karachi. There were, again, rumblings of discontent in the Air Force, though these were not important enough to attract public attention. Even the naval mutiny is, for the historian, important less for what the mutineers did than for the light it throws on the attitudes of the leaders—old and new. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was grooming himself for the Home Ministership of free India, asked the mutineers to surrender. Maulana Azad's lucid comment is interesting: 'It was clear to me that this was not an appropriate time for any mass movement or direct action. We have to watch the course of events and carry on negotiations with the British Government.' Nehru's explanation given to Leonard Mosley (*The Last Days of the British Raj*, 1977, p. 47) is even more revealing. 'We were tired men. We were not prepared to go to jail again.'<sup>131</sup> That was the psychology of the High Command who were anxious to appease Jinnah even when Jinnah was losing ground. But Aruna Asaf Ali, whom I have earlier described as a symbol of the union of the revolutionary methods of Gandhi and Subhas, was probably the leader of the organization behind these simultaneous mutinies in the Navy; she came over to Delhi and through Maulana Azad secured amnesty for the mutineers from Lord Auchinleck, who, as is manifest from his own comments on the I.N.A., had been so completely bewil-

dered by the conduct of the Indian armed forces that he was in no mood to punish anybody. Not for nothing did the Viceroy rally Congress President Maulana Azad about the anomaly between Asaf Ali carrying on 'negotiations' as a member of the non-violent Working Committee and his wife Aruna spearheading mutiny and sabotage!

Commander-in-Chief Auchinleck felt that he was a helpless onlooker who could no longer command or control Indian members of the British Indian Army, Navy or the Air Force. The symptoms were not very encouraging if he looked at the people of his 'own race'. Towards the end of 1945 and in January 1946 there were mutinies among the R.A.F. personnel who wanted to be demobilized and repatriated. Yet if Britain were to retain even a semblance of authority over India, she had to maintain a large force of her own, if not a regular army of occupation. Could she afford to do so with her depleted finances and the changed attitude of her own people? When the Labour Government came to power after the War, it wanted to concentrate on social reconstruction and hoped to bring defence expenditure down to 5 per cent of the GNP.<sup>132</sup> But since in 1946 it stood at 20 per cent, the maintenance of an expensive military presence east of Suez was out of the question. Neither did the mood of the people encourage such an adventure. Young men who had joined the war as civilian conscripts were anxious to leave a country in which they felt they were unwanted, and their parents did not make Attlee Prime Minister to enable him to keep their sons in permanent exile.

If England wanted to maintain a presence in India, she must depend on the loyalty of Indian soldiers, sailors and airmen with, at best, a sprinkling of British officers at the top. But as the puzzled admissions of Auchinleck, quoted above, show, the loyalty of the Indian Army, more or less intact in 1857 and never seriously disturbed since, had been thoroughly shaken by Subhaschandra Bose and his experiment of the I.N.A. Although Attlee did not mention either Subhaschandra Bose or the I.N.A. in his speech on 15 March 1946, he must have thought of them, and Auchinleck's despatches also do not yield any coherent meaning unless the impact of Subhaschandra Bose and the I.N.A. on the 'temperature of 1946' is taken into account. It is said that when, some time after relinquishing office as Prime



Minister, Attlee came to India as Lord Attlee and stayed at Government House in Calcutta, he freely acknowledged to the then Governor of West Bengal the weight given by him and his Government to the change in 'temperature' effected by Subhaschandra Bose and the I.N.A. and also admitted that but for this the transfer might not have been as quick and as unequivocal as it was. This aspect of the Indian struggle is thus expressed with vigour and literary flavour by Michael Edwards: 'It slowly dawned upon the Government of India that the backbone of British Rule, the Indian Army, might now no longer be trustworthy. The ghost of Subhas Bose, like Hamlet's father, walked the battlements of the Red Fort, and his suddenly amplified figure overawed the conferences that were to lead to independence.'<sup>133</sup>

Through the ordeal of hunger, thirst, privation, forced marches, hairbreadth escapes and 'disastrous chances by flood and field', Subhaschandra Bose wrested freedom from the British and then left it to others to unfurl the National Flag on the Red Fort.



## Notes and References

The account given in Part One of the book is based partly on my personal knowledge, but derived largely from discussions with and materials supplied by the revolutionaries themselves—by, besides those mentioned in the body of the book, Satyaranjan Bakshi, Satya Gupta, and (for Anil Roy) by Sunil Das. A substantial portion of this part was read out to Hemchandra Ghose, who suggested some alterations here and there. Later on the entire manuscript was vetted by Sasanka Dasgupta. As a rule secret societies do not maintain written records, and when revolutionaries put pen to paper at a later date, their personal point of view colours their narrative of past incidents. I had, therefore, to sift carefully the materials I collected from my personal discussions with them and from other informed sources; and although I have read many written accounts left by revolutionaries from Jadugopal Mukherji and M. N. Roy to Bhupen Rakshitroy, I have used them sparingly.

In Part Two I have generally depended on material easy to check and verify. As, however, it would not be worth while burdening the bibliography with acknowledgement of indebtedness about matters only incidental or uncontroverted, I have chosen to cite my sources only where I have ventured on controversial ground. Where immediate reference may be called for, I have indicated the source of my information in the body of the book.

### PREFACE

The Information Minister's explanation that the Exhibition was meant to highlight the contribution made by elected M.P.s only worsens the Government's case. Apart from the fact that Subhaschandra had been elected to the Central Assembly, which the Ministry should have known, when was Mahatmaji in the Indian Parliament or W. C. Bonnerjee or Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das? Another intriguing feature of the Exhibition was that there were six portraits of Gandhiji as against sixteen of Jawaharlal and twenty-six of Indira Gandhi. (*The Statesman*, 13.4.80; *Anandabazar Patrika*, 5.4.80 and 13.4.80).

## CHAPTER ONE

2. *Pather Dabi* ('The Claim of the Road') is a famous Bengali novel on Indian political revolution, second in importance only to Bankimchandra's *Anandamath*. If a message can be gleaned from a novel of stirring incidents and memorable characters, it may be thus paraphrased: As one moves along the road of life, one has to meet many claims and realize many values which are more important than political emancipation, but political emancipation must come first, and till it is achieved, everything else is only a diversion.
3. *Proceedings of the First Session of the Congress* (quoted in R. C. Majumdar, *A History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. I (1971), p. 364).
4. Tagore, *Letters to a Friend*, ed. C. F. Andrews (1928), pp. 34-6.

## CHAPTER THREE

5. *The Report of the Sedition Committee, 1918* (popularly known as the *Rowlatt Report* after the Chairman) gives an account of the Rodda affair (para 65, p. 44), which is generally correct but unreliable on some essential points. It says that after releasing 202 cases, the clerk (that is, Habu Mitra) took leave of his superiors on the plea that 'he was going to clear the remainder'. If he had done so, his bosses and police dogs would have been after him within a few hours instead of allowing him full seven days to fly from Calcutta; neither would it have been possible for the leaders to dispose of all the pistols and more than half the cartridges.
6. Surendranath Banerjee, *A Nation in Making* (1925), p. 300.
7. On 18 March 1922 Mahatmajī made a statement before the District Judge of Ahmedabad, Mr. Broomfield, who sentenced him to six years' imprisonment, but following an operation for appendicitis, he was unconditionally released in 1924. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, first written in Gujarati in 1922-24 and later translated into English by Pyarelal Nayyar and Mahadeva Desai, is also sometimes referred to as his *Autobiography*. I have used the paperback edition of 1940. The present reference is to p. 339.

## CHAPTER FOUR

8. A. C. Guha (ed.), *The Story of Indian Revolution* (1972), pp. 101-2.

## CHAPTER FIVE

9. I have an impression that the phrase was first used by Sir Asutosh Chaudhuri.
10. Subhaschandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle (1920-34)*, pp. 129, 153.
11. P. C. Ghose, *Mahatma Gandhi as I Saw Him* (1968), p. 134.

## CHAPTER SIX

I have drawn freely on Subhaschandra's (1) *An Indian Pilgrim: An Unfinished Autobiography* (1938), (2) *The Indian Struggle (1920-34)*, hereinafter referred to as *I.S.*, I, first published in India in 1948, and (3)

*The Indian Struggle* (1935-42), hereinafter referred to as *I.S.*, II (1952). The two volumes of *I.S.*, which give an illuminating account of the Freedom movement, particularly of political activities between the two World Wars, are a refreshing contrast to Jawaharlal Nehru's wobbly lucubrations in *An Autobiography* (1938) and *The Discovery of India* (1946). But one has to read between the lines when Bose speaks of the armed revolutionaries. If he had not exercised caution and reticence, he would have let down his colleagues and harmed the cause. He does sometimes speak of 'terrorism' as a form of reprisal (*I.S.*, I, p. 326), but not in Jawaharlal's way. His own connexion with 'militant radicals' is discernible in *I.S.*, I, and it comes to the surface in *I.S.*, II, the larger part of which was written when he had escaped out of India and was openly leading an armed struggle against British imperialism. The revolutionaries, he argues in both the volumes, adopted violent methods, because quite justifiably they had lost faith in constitutional agitation and passive resistance.

12. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 194.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

14. *I.S.*, I, p. 302: 'After Lord Ripon no Viceroy had adopted such a friendly attitude towards the Indian people as he [Lord Irwin] did.'

In *I.S.*, I, Bose speaks well of other Englishmen, such as Stanley Jackson (pp. 199, 421) and Lowman (p. 184), but it was Binoy Bose of B.V. who shot Lowman dead, and Bina Das, who tried to kill Stanley Jackson, belonged, I believe, to Jugantar. Apart from Subhaschandra's personal connexion with Bina's family, all revolutionaries were in a way his followers.

15. Guha, *The Story of Indian Revolution*, pp. 187 f.

#### CHAPTER SEVEN

16. Subhaschandra, whose revolutionary methods were different from Gandhiji's, gives a glowing description of the impact of the Dandi March in *I.S.*, I (p. 255): '... the move to Dandi was an event of historical importance which will rank on the same level with Napoleon's move to Paris on his return from Elba and'—*pace* Jawaharlal—'Mussolini's move to Rome ...'

#### CHAPTER ELEVEN

17. Quoted from Kalicharan Ghose, *The Roll of Honour* (1965), p. 610.

#### CHAPTER TWELVE

18. Kalicharan Ghose, *The Roll of Honour*, pp. 541-2.

#### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

19. Bose, *I.S.*, I, Ch. 14, pp. 360-70; *I.S.*, II, Appendix, pp. 49-50.

20. Gandhi, *Experiments with Truth*, pp. 80-1.

21. Gilbert Murray's own words are: 'Be careful in dealing with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasures, nothing for comfort or praise or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he thinks to be

- right. He is a dangerous, uncomfortable enemy, because his body, which you can always conquer, gives you so little purchase over his soul.' (Quoted from Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. I, 1946, p. 610.)
22. Gandhi, *Experiments with Truth*, p. 325.
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
  24. I have relied on three important works on the Khilafat question, viz. (i) Harry Luke, *The Old Turkey and the New* (1955), (ii) Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1968), and (iii) P. C. Bamford (Deputy Director of Intelligence, Government of India), *Histories of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements* (1925, reprinted 1974). I have also drawn on other works readily available, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History* (1942), John Gunther, *Inside Asia* (1942), and Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India 1916-1928* (1979).
  25. Gunther, *Inside Asia*, p. 547.
  26. H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe* (1936), pp. 1129-30.
  27. Harry Luke, *The Old Turkey and the New*, p. 151.
  28. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, pp. 263-4.
  29. Gandhi, *Experiments with Truth*, p. 369.

#### CHAPTER FOURTEEN

30. S. P. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography (D.N.B.)*, Vol. I, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta.
31. Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided* (1946), pp. 111-15.
32. Percival Spear, however, holds a different view. In his opinion, 'Taken as a whole, the act was a clear step towards representative and responsible government. Further development could only lead in that direction' (*A History of India*, Vol. II, 1965, pp. 178-9). The cynical undertone of Morley's remark, quoted in the text, will not be missed by the discerning reader.
33. Quoted from Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided*, p. 116.
34. Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah* (1964), pp. 57-8.
35. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 44.
36. Quoted by Mushirul Hasan in *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India*, p. 172.
37. Bamford, *Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement*, p. 18.
38. Bolitho, *Jinnah*, pp. 81 ff. (esp. pp. 88-9).
39. Bose, *I.S.*, I, pp. 204, 218-19.
40. A very comprehensive account of the interaction of communal and nationalist Muslim politics in British India is given by Rajendra Prasad and Mushirul Hasan in the books cited.
41. Dorothy Norman reproduces this alternative resolution in *Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, Vol. I (1965), p. 536.
42. Bolitho, *Jinnah*, p. 96.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
44. Jinnah's dramatization of his disappointment after 1928, when he really embarked on a new adventure, deceived many of his later

admirers who were only too eager to swallow his story. Irene Pant, who became Liaquat Ali's second wife five years later, in 1933, and had probably not seen Liaquat in 1928, repeated it to Hector Bolitho (op. cit., pp. 93-4, 96, 104-5), adding that it was her husband who had stood by Jinnah then. But Mushirul Hasan (op. cit., pp. 266, 296), who gives a long list of the Muslim participants in the 1928 meetings, does not mention Liaquat Ali at all.

45. P. C. Ghose, *Mahatma Gandhi as I Saw Him*, p. 190.
46. M. A. Jinnah, *Speeches and Writings*, ed. Jamiluddin Ahmed, Vol. I (1960), pp. 166-7, 246, 253-4, *et passim*.
47. Quoted by Rajendra Prasad in *India Divided*, p. 229.
48. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (1959), hereinafter referred to as *I.W.F.*, p. 93.
49. Bose, *I.S.*, II, p. 6. Earlier, on p. 4, he says, 'This is the plan called Pakistan, which emanated from the fertile brain of a Britisher and which has precedents in other parts of the British Empire.'

#### CHAPTER FIFTEEN

50. I have slightly modified Oswald Spengler's pronouncement in *The Decline of the West* (tr. C. F. Atkinson, one-volume edition, 1971), p. 140: 'The insignificant Augustus made an epoch and the great Tiberius proved ineffective.'
51. Dorothy Norman, *Nehru*, Vol. I, p. 37.
52. Jawaharlal Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters* (1958), nos. 147, 148.
53. Quoted in Dorothy Norman, *Nehru*, Vol. I, p. 426.
54. Hugh Tinker, *Experiment with Freedom* (1967), p. 154.
55. Azad, *I.W.F.*, pp. 67-69; Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 526. Azad's comments as well as Nehru's are, as could be expected, much less stringent than mine.
56. In *D.N.B.*, Vol. III. Somewhat surprisingly, Subhaschandra also speaks eloquently of the Bardoli struggle (*I.S.*, I, p. 214). However, the *Seventy-fifth Birthday Volume presented to Gandhiji* (1945) deflates it (p. 246) as a 'campaign against increment in land revenue by Settlement Revision officers'. It was not a political movement at all.
57. Azad, *I.W.F.*, pp. 15, 37.
58. Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, no. 169.
59. J. R. Wood in *People, Princes and Paramount Power* (1978), p. 251.
60. Rajendra Prasad, *India Divided*, p. 129.
61. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 370.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 86. Nehru's acceptance comes first, almost automatically, and then he gropes for arguments in support of his blind obedience.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
64. Bose, *I.S.*, I, pp. 243 ff.
65. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 257.
66. Azad, *I.W.F.*, pp. 160-1.
67. Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928), pp. 441-2.
68. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, pp. 515 ff, 591-3.

69. Shaw, *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, p. 318.
70. Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, no. 255.
71. Shaw, *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, p. 444.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

72. Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim*, p. 93.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
74. Bose, *I.S.*, I., pp. 80-2.
75. Guha, *The Story of Indian Revolution*, p. 208.
76. Bose, *I.S.*, I., p. 102.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 108-9. Subhaschandra does not believe that Mahatmaji was capable of such duplicity, but he does condemn the suspension of Satyagraha in 1922 as 'an anti-climax'.
78. Bose, *I.S.*, I, p. 92; cp. Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India*, pp. 175, 202-3.
79. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 693.
80. V. P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of Indian States* (1956), p. 415.
81. Bose, *I.S.*, I, p. 90. From a Bengali essay of Saratchandra Chatterji, who was asked to draft an appeal, I guess that the meeting was held in Deshbandhu's house.
82. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 315 *et passim*.
83. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 508.
84. Alan Palmer, *Penguin Dictionary of Twentieth Century History* (1979), p. 255.
85. Bose, *I.S.*, II, p. 26.
86. Bose, *I.S.*, I, pp. 218 ff: 'The responsibility for producing a constitution belongs solely and exclusively to the party that fights for freedom' (p. 220).
87. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 210.
88. Bose, *I.S.*, I, p. 263; *I.S.*, II; pp. 49 ff.
89. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, pp. 383-4; Dorothy Norman, *Nehru*, Vol. I, p. 347.
90. D. G. Tendulkar *et al.* (eds.), *Seventy-fifth Birthday Volume presented to Gandhiji*, pp. 83-94.
91. Bose, *I.S.*, II, pp. 6-7.
92. Bolitho, *Jinnah*, p. 145.
93. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, pp. 508-9.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

94. Here is Nehru's version of the Hamletian dilemma: 'How to reconcile the two dominating trends in our policy: Opposition to British imperialism and opposition to fascism and nazism?' (*The Discovery of India*, pp. 504, 526)
95. Michael Edwardes, *The Last Years of British India* (1963), p. 84.
96. Bolitho, *Jinnah*, p. 137.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
98. *D.N.B.*, Vol. IV. Subhaschandra, however, ascribes it to Ellen Wilkinson, M.P. (*I.S.*, I, p. 277).



99. Peter Calvocoressi, *The British Experience 1945-75* (1978), p. 249.
100. In my account of Subhaschandra's historic exit from India ending up with his departure from Kabul, I have had various sources, written and oral, at my disposal, but I have drawn most extensively on Bhagatram Talwar's narrative, *The Talwars of Pathan Land and Subhaschandra's Great Escape* (1976), supported by a graphic report, written for my use, by Santimoy Ganguly who confines himself to his own adventure.
101. Edwardes, *Last Years of British India*, p. 143.
102. I. G. Elliott, *The Frontier* (1968), p. 71.
103. Azad, *I.W.F.*, pp. 35-7. Jawaharlal's long-winded, mostly pointless narrative of this pre-Cripps period is to be found in *The Discovery of India*, pp. 501-48, to which reference has been made in the opening paragraph of this chapter. The deliberations of the Working Committee were 'theoretical' in a deeper sense than was intended by Azad, who being himself entangled in the spider's web, could not see them in the right perspective.
104. Nehru, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, no. 268. (This letter has been referred to already on p. 208 *supra*.)
105. Tendulkar *et al.*, *Seventy-fifth Birthday Volume presented to Gandhiji*, pp. 379-80.
106. Azad, *I.W.F.*, p. 41. Cripps is said to have complained to Azad that he had not expected a man like Gandhiji to speak in glowing terms about Subhas. On the other hand Subhaschandra at this stage noted with relief the difference between Gandhi's realism and Nehru's ideological rigidity (*I.S.*, II, p. 40).

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

107. Quoted by Edwardes in *Last Years of British India*, p. 81.
108. 'The term "Quit India"', notes Pyarelal, '... was coined by an American correspondent in the course of an interview with Gandhi, which "caught on" ...' (Dorothy Norman, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 117). The phrase 'caught on' just because it expressed Gandhiji's and the country's mood more correctly than 'orderly British withdrawal'.
109. Tinker, *Experiment with Freedom*, p. 28.
110. Hugh Toye, *The Springing Tiger* (Jaico, 1970), p. 84.
111. In my account of the I.N.A. and Subhaschandra's collaboration with the Japanese, I have generally followed Joyce Lebra, *Jungle Alliance: Japan and the Indian National Army* (1971).
112. The epithet 'Netaji' was first used in December 1941 when Subhaschandra was still in Germany, but it acquired celebrity and became almost an alternate proper name after he came to Japan and re-formed the Indian National Army.
113. Joyce Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, p. 65.
114. J. F. C. Fuller, *The Decisive Battles of the Western World and Their Influence upon History* (1956), Chronicle 16 and Chapter 16, pp. 590-628. Admiral King's summary verdict on the Battle of Medway Island is quoted by Fuller on p. 477. Joyce Lebra notes that Japan had thought of an early Indian offensive and that later on Tojo regretted

that he had abandoned it. After Guadalcanal the attempt was foredoomed to failure. (*Jungle Alliance*, pp. 158, 162)

115. Guha, *The Story of Indian Revolution*, pp. 108-9.

#### CHAPTER NINETEEN

116. Azad, *I.W.F.*, p. 88.
117. Calvocoressi, *The British Experience*, pp. 10 ff.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 23. With justifiable pride, Sir William Beveridge, who presented his Report on Social Insurance on 1 December 1942, claimed that his name was 'better known than any save Churchill's'.
119. Calvocoressi, *The British Experience*, p. 25.
120. Azad, *I.W.F.*, p. 155; Dorothy Norman, *Nehru*, Vol. II, pp. 235-9.
121. In spite of ambivalences, Jinnah was consistent in his dependence on the British connexion. He joined the Congress in 1906, and it was in 1906 that Archbold and company engineered the Aga Khan Deputation about separate electorates for Muslims. Jinnah made good use of this concession, clinching it in the Lucknow Pact of 1916. It is primarily because of the proposed snapping of British connexion that Jinnah left the Home Rule League—and the Congress. After his repeated English sojourns he flaunted his Fourteen Points, and clung to them (in fact, only to No. 5 because the other demands had been met) right up to 1940 when he propounded his demand for Pakistan. Attlee's policy statement of 15 March 1946 unhinged his mind, and the Direct Action of 16 August was a suicidal move. He now put forward the suggestion for a corridor (Dorothy Norman, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 320) like a drowning man catching at a straw, in the hope that the British would stay on to maintain a peace-keeping force.
122. In an article 'Subhaschandra Bose—His Legacy and Legend' in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 26, 1953, p. 350. I am indebted to Joyce Lebra for the reference.
123. Dorothy Norman, *Nehru*, Vol. II, p. 221.
124. Tinker, *Experiment with Freedom*, p. 96.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
126. Quoted by Edwardes in *Last Years of British India*, p. 145.
127. Edwardes, *Last Years of British India*, p. 219.
128. Menon, *The Integration of Indian States*, pp. 399, 409, 410.
129. Hansard: Column. 1424 (Prime Minister on *Cabinet Mission*, 15 March 1946).
130. Reproduced from Kalicharan Ghose, *The Roll of Honour*, p. 799.
131. Azad, *I.W.F.* p. 130. Although Maulana Azad stood for retaining a united India even after Mountbatten's arrival and advocacy of Partition, Patel and Nehru (*I.W.F.*, pp. 164 ff) fell easy victims to the new Viceroy's 'dangerous charm'. It is in this context that Mahatmajī's rueful comments to Zakir Husain, quoted by Hugh Tinker (notes nos. 54 and 125 above), acquire significance. Gandhiji is said to have thus commented on the rift between himself and Patel: 'Vallabhbhai, I always thought that you and I were one. I begin to see that we are two' (Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (1951),

- pp. 268-9). Obviously, after Attlee's policy statement, Gandhiji had become expendable.
132. Calvocoressi, *The British Experience*, p. 112.
133. Edwardes, *Last Years of British India*, p. 93; also, Joyce Lebra, *Jungle Alliance*, p. 219.



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